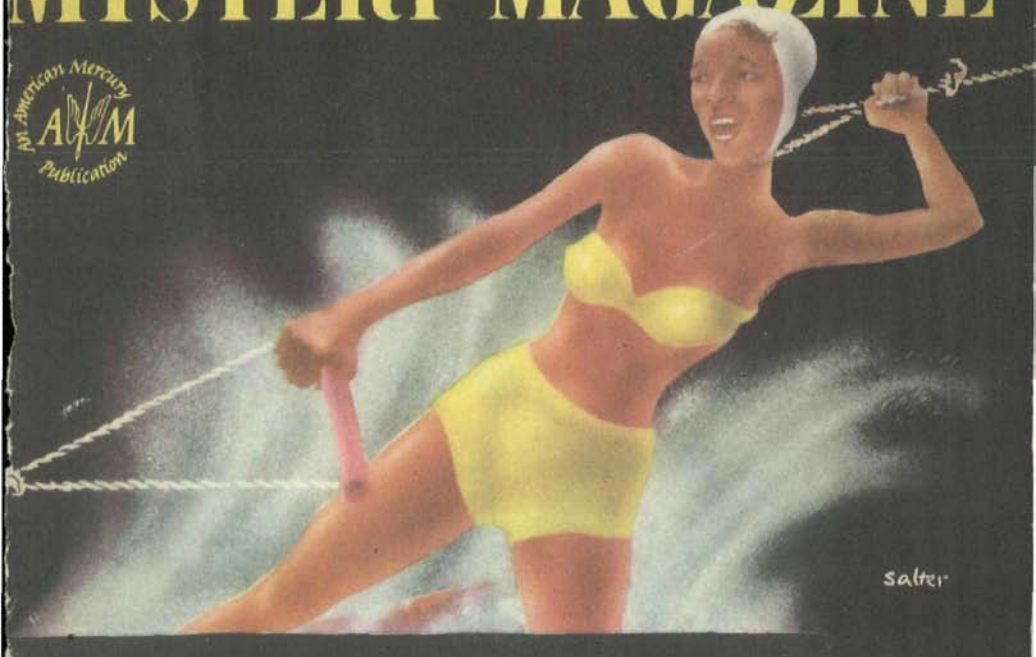
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A Mercury Publication



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*Number 44

Who Killed Bob Teal? — DASHIELL HAMMETT
The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone — T. S. STRIBLING
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The Widow's Walk — JACK FINNEY
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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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NEWS OF THE NEW

INNER SANCTUM MYSTERIES

Vol. XI July, 1947 No. 7

Duluth Divorce Rumors Linked With Mexican Murder

Beautiful Iris Duluth is rumored to be seeking a Mexican divorce from her ex-Navy husband, Peter Duluth, with whom she was instrumental in solving five sensational murder cases.* Friends who regarded the Peter Duluths as an outstandingly happy couple among the young married sleuth set, are staggered. Mrs. Duluth, it has been discovered, plans to wed dashing young British novelist, Martin Haven. (ST) s may throw new light on the "accidental" death of the novelist's heiress wife whose shattered body was found yesterday below the balcony of her home. There is considerable curiosity here as to whether Peter Duluth will investigate this murder in which his estranged wife is involved. It is thought in some quarters that Mr. Duluth is otherwise occupied: he has been seen at local cafes with a striking English beauty of doubtful reputation.

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*Recorded in *Puzzle for Fools, Puzzle for Players, Puzzle for Puppets, Puzzle for Wantons, Puzzle for Fiends.*

Andy Blake Expected to Survive Florida Vacation With Arab

"I still hope to survive," says Florida-vacationer Andy Blake, "in spite of my wife Arab. When I first came here I dreamed of lying under a coconut palm sipping a cool drink. Four years of being married to the deceptively fragile-looking Arab should have taught me different. Yesterday we passed that deserted green houseboat hidden in a cove. Arab claimed she saw a woman's face at the window. She said that investigation was called for.

It was not called for, I said.

We investigated.

So we found this girl with the red marks on her wrists and ankles, and the wild explanations that were altogether different every time she told them. And—I'm sorry, I can't continue this interview. My wife Arab has just found another mur . . ."

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**The first four were *Don't Catch Me, All Over but the Shooting, Lay That Pistol Down,* and *Shoot if You Must.*

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its

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1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $3,000 as first prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, six (6) awards of $500 each will be made for the six (6) next best original detective-crime short stories. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at the magazine's regular rates.

2. Stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. Three judges will make the final decision in the Contest: Christopher Morley, noted author, critic, and connoisseur, and member of the Editorial Board of the Book-of-the-Month Club; Howard Haycraft, author of "Murder for Pleasure," the most authoritative history of the detective story; and Ellery Queen.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1947.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas, 1947.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $50 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $50 per story.

8. Every care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

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THOU ART THE MAN!

Who is the Continental Op? Usually he is described as fat, forty, and nameless. But are any of these adjectives correct? "The time has come," the Walrus said . . . The idea of a nameless detective was invented by the Father of Firsts, Edgar Allan Poe, who sired the breed in his short story, "Thou Art the Man." The breed was kept alive by Anna Katharine Green in her tale called X.Y.Z. It was brought to its first major peak of development by Baroness Orczy in her wonderful series about the Old Man in the Corner. And among contemporary sleuths, surely Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op has done most to carry on one of the noblest traditions in 'tecdom. But now we pose the question: Is the Continental Op a man without "a local habitation and a name"?

There can be no doubt as to the Continental Op's local habitation. He roams all over these United States, but his special bloodhound bailiwick is San Francisco. There is also no doubt as to the Continental Op's real identity. Here is the astounding evidence. In November 1924 "True Detective" magazine (note the word TRUE*) published a story titled "Who Killed Bob Teal?" Accepting the word "true" to mean precisely what it does, we can without hesitation accept the authorship of that story as given by "True Detective" magazine. There, on page 60 of the November 1924 issue, in boldface type and big as life, the story is signed*

By DASHIELL HAMMETT
of the Continental Detective Agency

So the Continental Op is, by his own admission in print, Dashiell Hammett himself! Is the Continental Op therefore fat? No, indeed! Never in his lifetime has Mr. Hammett been fat, nor is he ever likely to be — he is, in all truth, the original thin man. Is the Continental Op forty? No, again. At the time Mr. Hammett acknowledged his identity as the Op he was exactly thirty. And is the Continental Op nameless? Well, no one in his right mind would make the assertion that Dashiell Hammett is anonymous!

Have we shattered one of your pet illusions? We're genuinely sorry, but life is real, life is earnest, and to quote from the most recent movie version of THE MALTESE FALCON, *life is also "the stuff of dreams." Hold tight to your detectival dreams, keep right on thinking of the Continental Op as the man without a name — and skip the next paragraph. But if you are a realist, listen:*

One night Dashiell Hammett and your Editor were sitting in Luchow's Restaurant on 14th Street. We had sampled various liquids ranging from

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pale yellow to dark brown. We had talked of many things, and the time had come — but we said that once before, didn't we? Ah, those amber fluids — they set the tongue to padding. Anyway, about this character known as the Continental Op: who was he, really? And Dash gave us the lowdown. The Continental Op is based on a real-life person — James (Jimmy) Wright, Assistant Superintendent, in the good old days, of Pinkerton's Baltimore agency, under whom Dashiell Hammett actually worked. So, truth will out — and that's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us Dash. We have no idea where James Wright is now, but if he reads these words, or if somehow they are called to his attention, we want him to know that millions of detective fans all over the world owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for inspiring Hammett to create the Continental Op.

WHO KILLED BOB TEAL?

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

"TEAL was killed last night." The Old Man — the Continental Detective Agency's San Francisco manager — spoke without looking at me. His voice was as mild as his smile, and he gave no indication of the turmoil that was seething in his mind.

If I kept quiet, waiting for the Old Man to go on, it wasn't because the news didn't mean anything to me. I had been fond of Bob Teal — we all had. He had come to the agency fresh from college two years before; and if ever a man had the makings of a crack detective in him, this slender, broad-shouldered lad had. Two years is little enough time in which to pick up the first principles of sleuthing, but Bob Teal, with his quick eye, cool nerve, balanced head, and wholehearted interest in the work, was already well along the way to expertness. I had an almost fatherly interest in him, since I had given him most of his early training.

The Old Man didn't look at me as he went on. He was talking to the open window at his elbow.

"He was shot with a .32, twice, through the heart. He was shot behind a row of signboards on the vacant lot on the northwest corner of Hyde and Eddy Streets, at about ten last night. His body was found by a patrolman a little after eleven. The gun was found fifteen feet away. I have seen him and I have gone over the ground myself. The rain last night wiped out any leads the ground may have held, but from the condition of Teal's clothing and the position in which he was found, I would say that

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there was no struggle, and that he was shot where he was found, and not carried there afterward. He was lying behind the signboards, about thirty feet from the sidewalk, and his hands were empty. The gun was held close enough to him to singe the breast of his coat. Apparently no one either saw or heard the shooting. The rain and wind would have kept pedestrians off the street, and would have deadened the reports of a .32, which are not especially loud, anyway."

The Old Man's pencil began to tap the desk, its gentle clicking setting my nerves on edge. Presently it stopped, and the Old Man went on:

"Teal was shadowing a Herbert Whitacre — had been shadowing him for three days. Whitacre is one of the partners in the firm Ogburn & Whitacre, farm-development engineers. They have options on a large area of land in several of the new irrigation districts. Ogburn handles the sales end, while Whitacre looks after the rest of the business, including the bookkeeping.

"Last week Ogburn discovered that his partner had been making false entries. The books show certain payments made on the land, and Ogburn learned that these payments had not been made. He estimates that the amount of Whitacre's thefts may be between $150,000 to $250,000. Ogburn came in to see me three days ago and told me all this, and wanted to have Whitacre shadowed in an endeavor to learn what he has done with the stolen money. Their firm is still a partnership, and a partner cannot be prosecuted for stealing from the partnership, of course. Thus, Ogburn could not have his partner arrested, but he hoped to find the money, and then recover it through civil action. Also he was afraid that Whitacre might disappear.

"I sent Teal out to shadow Whitacre, who supposedly didn't know that his partner suspected him. Now I am sending you out to find Whitacre. I'm determined to find him and convict him if I have to let all regular business go and put every man I have on this job for a year. You can get Teal's reports from the clerks. Keep in touch with me."

All that, from the Old Man, was more than an ordinary man's oath written in blood.

In the clerical office I got the two reports Bob had turned in. There was none for the last day, of course, as he would not have written that until after he had quit work for the night. The first of these two reports had already been copied and a copy sent to Ogburn; a typist was working on the other now.

In his reports Bob had described Whitacre as a man of about thirty-seven, with brown hair and eyes, a nervous manner, a smooth-shaven, medium-complexioned face, and rather small feet. He was about five feet eight inches tall, weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds, and dressed fashionably, though quietly. He lived with his wife in an apartment on Gough Street. They had no children.

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Ogburn had given Bob a description of Mrs. Whitacre: a short, plump, blond woman of something less than thirty.

Those who remember this affair will know that the city, the detective agency, and the people involved all had names different from the ones I have given them. But they will know also that I have kept the facts true. Names of some sort are essential to clearness, and when the use of the real names might cause embarrassment, or pain even, pseudonyms are the most satisfactory alternative.

In shadowing Whitacre, Bob had learned nothing that seemed to be of any value in finding the stolen money. Whitacre had gone about his usual business, apparently, and Bob had seen him do nothing downright suspicious. But Whitacre had seemed very nervous, had often stopped to look around, obviously suspecting that he was being shadowed without being sure of it. On several occasions Bob had had to drop him to avoid being recognized. On one of these occasions, while waiting in the vicinity of Whitacre's residence for him to return, Bob had seen Mrs. Whitacre — or a woman who fit the description Ogburn had given — leave in a taxicab. Bob had not tried to follow her, but he had made a memorandum of the taxi's license number.

These two reports read and practically memorized, I left the agency and went down to Ogburn & Whitacre's suite in the Packard Building. A stenographer ushered me into a tastefully furnished office, where Ogburn sat at a desk signing mail. He offered me a chair. I introduced myself to him: a medium-sized man of perhaps thirty-five, with sleek brown hair and the cleft chin that is associated in my mind with orators, lawyers, and salesmen.

"Oh, yes!" he said, pushing aside the mail, his mobile, intelligent face lighting up. "Has Mr. Teal found anything?"

"Mr. Teal was shot and killed last night."

He looked at me blankly for a moment out of wide brown eyes, and then repeated: "Killed?"

"Yes," I replied, and told him what little I knew about it.

"You don't think —" he began when I had finished, and then stopped. "You don't think Herb would have done that?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't think Herb would commit murder! He's been jumpy the last few days, and I was beginning to think he suspected I had discovered his thefts, but I don't believe he would have gone that far, even if he knew Mr. Teal was following him. I honestly don't!"

"Suppose," I suggested, "that sometime yesterday Teal found where he had put the stolen money, and then Whitacre learned that Teal knew it. Don't you think that under those circumstances Whitacre might have killed him?"

"Perhaps," he said slowly, "but I'd hate to think so. In a moment of

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panic Herb might — but I really don't think he would."

"When did you see him last?"

"Yesterday. We were here in the office together most of the day. He left for home a few minutes before six. But I talked with him over the phone later. He called me up at home a little after seven, and said he was coming down to see me, wanted to tell me something. I thought he was going to confess his dishonesty, and that maybe we would be able to straighten out this miserable affair. But he didn't show up; changed his mind, I suppose. His wife called up at about ten. She wanted him to bring something from downtown when he went home, but of course he was not there. I stayed in all evening waiting for him, but he didn't ——"

He stuttered, stopped talking, and his face drained white.

"My God, I'm wiped out!" he said faintly, as if the thought of his own position had just come to him. "Herb gone, money gone, three years' work gone for nothing! And I'm legally responsible for every cent he stole. God!"

He looked at me with eyes that pleaded for a contradiction, but I couldn't do anything except assure him that everything possible would be done to find both Whitacre and the money. I left him trying frantically to get his attorney on the telephone.

From Ogburn's office I went up to Whitacre's apartment. As I turned the corner below into Gough Street I saw a big, hulking man going up the apartment house steps, and recognized him as George Dean. Hurrying to join him, I regretted that he had been assigned to the job instead of some other member of the Police Detective Homicide Detail. Dean isn't a bad sort, but he isn't so satisfactory to work with as some of the others; that is, you can never be sure that he isn't holding out some important detail so that George Dean would shine as the clever sleuth in the end. Working with a man of that sort, you're bound to fall into the same habit — which doesn't make for teamwork.

I arrived in the vestibule as Dean pressed Whitacre's bell-button.

"Hello," I said. "You in on this?"

"Uh-huh. What d'you know?"

"Nothing. I just got it."

The front door clicked open, and we went together up to the Whitacre's apartment on the third floor. A plump, blond woman in a light blue house-dress opened the apartment door. She was rather pretty in a thick-featured, stolid way.

"Mrs. Whitacre?" Dean inquired.

"Yes."

"Is Mr. Whitacre in?"

"No. He went to Los Angeles this morning," she said, and her face was truthful.

"Know where we can get in touch with him there?"

"Perhaps at the Ambassador, but I think he'll be back by to-morrow."

Dean showed her his badge.

"We want to ask you a few questions," he told her, and with no

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appearance of astonishment she opened the door wide for us to enter. She led us into a blue and cream living-room, where we found a chair apiece. She sat facing us on a big blue settle.

"Where was your husband last night?" Dean asked.

"Home. Why?" Her round blue eyes were faintly curious.

"Home all night?"

"Yes, it was a rotten rainy night. Why?" She looked from Dean to me.

Dean's glance met mine, and I nodded an answer to the question that I read there.

"Mrs. Whitacre," he said bluntly, "I have a warrant for your husband's arrest."

"A warrant? For what?"

"Murder."

"Murder?" It was a stifled scream.

"Exactly, an' last night."

"But—but I told you he was——"

"And Ogburn told me," I interrupted leaning forward, "that you called up his apartment last night, asking if your husband was there."

She looked at me blankly for a dozen seconds; and then she laughed, the clear laugh of one who has been the victim of some slight joke.

"You win," she said, and there was neither shame nor humiliation in either face or voice. "Now listen"—the amusement had left her — " I don't know what Herb has done, or how I stand, and I oughtn't to talk until I see a lawyer. But I like to dodge all the trouble I can. If you folks will tell me what's what, on your word of honor, I'll maybe tell you what I know, if anything. What I mean is, if talking will make things any easier for me, if you can show me it will, maybe I'll talk — provided I know anything."

That seemed fair enough, if a little surprising. Apparently this plump woman who could lie with every semblance of candor, and laugh when she was tripped up, wasn't interested in anything much beyond her own comfort.

"You tell it," Dean said to me.

I shot it out all in a lump.

"Your husband had been cooking the books for some time, and got into his partner for something like $200,000 before Ogburn got wise to it. Then he had your husband shadowed, trying to find the money. Last night your husband took the man who was shadowing him over on a lot and shot him."

Her face puckered thoughtfully. Mechanically she reached for a package of a popular brand of cigarettes that lay on a table behind the settle, and proffered them to Dean and me. We shook our heads. She put a cigarette in her mouth, scratched a match on the sole of her slipper, lit the cigarette, and stared at the burning end. Finally she shrugged, her face cleared, and she looked up at us.

"I'm going to talk," she said. "I never got any of the money, and I'd be a chump to make a goat of myself for Herb. He was all right, but if he's run out and left me flat, there's no use of me making a lot of trouble for myself over it. Here goes: I'm not

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Mrs. Whitacre, except on the register. My name is Mae Landis. Maybe there is a real Mrs. Whitacre, and maybe not. I don't know. Herb and I have been living together here for over a year.

"About a month ago he began to get jumpy, nervous, even worse than usual. He said he had business worries. Then a couple of days ago I discovered that his pistol was gone from the drawer where it had been kept ever since we came here, and that he was carrying it. I asked him: 'What's the idea?' He said he thought he was being followed, and asked me if I'd seen anybody hanging around the neighborhood as if watching our place. I told him no; I thought he was nutty.

"Night before last he told me that he was in trouble, and might have to go away, and that he couldn't take me with him, but would give me enough money to take care of me for a while. He seemed excited, packed his bags so they'd be ready if he needed them in a hurry, and burned up all his photos and a lot of letters and papers. His bags are still in the bedroom, if you want to go through them. When he didn't come home last night I had a hunch that he had beat it without his bags and without saying a word to me, much less giving me any money — leaving me with only twenty dollars to my name and with the rent due in four days."

"When did you see him last?"

"About eight o'clock last night. He told me he was going down to Mr. Ogburn's apartment to talk some business over with him, but he didn't go there. I know that. I ran out of cigarettes — I like Elixir Russians, and I can't get them uptown here — so I called up Mr. Ogburn's to ask Herb to bring some home with him when he came, and Mr. Ogburn said he hadn't been there."

"How long have you known Whitacre?" I asked.

"Couple of years. I think I met him first at one of the Beach resorts."

"Has he got any people?"

"Not that I know of. I don't know a whole lot about him. Oh, yes! I do know that he served three years in prison in Oregon for forgery. He told me that one night when he was lushed up. He served them under the name of Barber, or Barbee, or something like that. He said he was walking the straight and narrow now."

Dean produced a small automatic pistol, fairly new-looking in spite of the mud that clung to it, and handed it to the woman.

"Ever see that?"

She nodded her blond head. "Yep! That's Herb's, or its twin."

Dean pocketed the gun again, and we stood up.

"Where do I stand now?" she asked. "You're not going to lock me up as a witness or anything, are you?"

"Not just now," Dean assured her. "Stick around where we can find you if we want you, and you won't be bothered. Got any idea which direction Whitacre'd be likely to go in?"

"No."

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"We'd like to give the place the once-over. Mind?"

"Go ahead," she invited. "Take it apart if you want to. I'm coming all the way with you people."

We very nearly did take the place apart, but we found not a thing of value. Whitacre, when he had burned the things that might have given him away, had made a clean job of it.

"Did he ever have any pictures taken by a professional photographer?" I asked just before we left.

"Not that I know of."

"Will you let us know if you hear anything or remember anything else that might help?"

"Sure," she said heartily; "sure."

Dean and I rode down in the elevator in silence, and walked out into Gough Street.

"What do you think of all that?" I asked when we were outside.

"She's a lil, huh?" He grinned. "I wonder how much she knows. She identified the gun an' gave us that dope about the forgery sentence up north, but we'd of found out them things anyway. If she was wise she'd tell us everything she knew we'd find out, an' that would make her other stuff go over stronger. Think she's dumb or wise?"

"We won't guess," I said. "We'll slap a shadow on her and cover her mail. I have the number of a taxi she used a couple days ago. We'll look that up too."

At a corner drugstore I telephoned the Old Man, asking him to detail a couple of the boys to keep Mae Landis and her apartment under surveillance night and day; also to have the Post Office Department let us know if she got any mail that might have been addressed by Whitacre. I told the Old Man I would see Ogburn and get some specimens of the fugitive's writing for comparison with the woman's mail.

Then Dean and I set about tracing the taxi in which Bob Teal had seen the woman ride away. Half an hour in the taxi company's office gave us the information that she had been driven to a number on Greenwich Street. We went to the Greenwich Street address.

It was a ramshackle building, divided into apartments or flats of a dismal and dingy sort. We found the landlady in the basement: a gaunt woman in soiled gray, with a hard, thin-lipped mouth and pale, suspicious eyes. She was rocking vigorously in a creaking chair and sewing on a pair of overalls, while three dirty kids tussled with a mongrel puppy.

Dean showed his badge, and told her that we wanted to speak to her in privacy. She got up to chase the kids and their dog out, and then stood with hands on hips facing us.

"Well, what do you want?" she demanded sourly.

"Want to get a line on your tenants," Dean said. "Tell us about them."

"Tell you about them?" She had a voice that would have been harsh enough even if she hadn't been in such a peevish mood. "What do you

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think I got to say about 'em? What do you think I am? I'm a woman that minds her own business! Nobody can't say that I don't run a respectable ——"

This was getting us nowhere.

"Who lives in number one?" I asked.

"The Auds — two old folks and their grandchildren. If you know anything against them, it's more'n them that has lived with 'em for ten years does!"

"Who lives in number two?"

"Mrs. Codman and her boys, Frank and Fred. They been here three years, and ——"

I carried her from apartment to apartment, until finally we reached a second-floor one that didn't bring quite so harsh an indictment of my stupidity for suspecting its occupants of whatever it was that I suspected them of.

"The Quirks live there." She merely glowered now, whereas she had had a snippy manner before. "And they're decent people."

"How long have they been here?"

"Six months or more."

"What does he do for a living?"

"I don't know." Sullenly: "Travels maybe."

"How many in the family?"

"Just him and her, and they're nice quiet people, too."

"What does he look like?"

"Like an ordinary man. I ain't a detective. I don't go 'round snoopin' into folks' faces to see what they look like, and prying. I ain't ——"

"How old a man is he?"

"Maybe between thirty-five and forty, if he ain't younger or older."

"Large or small?"

"He ain't as short as you, and he ain't as tall as this feller with you," glaring scornfully from my short stoutness to Dean's big bulk, "and he ain't as fat as neither of you."

"Mustache?"

"No."

"Light hair?"

"No." Triumphantly: "Dark."

"Dark eyes, too?"

"I guess so."

Dean, standing off to one side, looked over the woman's shoulder at me. His lips framed the name: "Whitacre."

"Now how about Mrs. Quirk — what does she look like?" I went on.

"She's got light hair, is short and chunky, and maybe under thirty."

Dean and I nodded our satisfaction at each other; that sounded like Mae Landis, right enough.

"Are they home much?" I continued.

"I don't know," the gaunt woman snarled sullenly, and I knew she did know, so I waited, looking at her, and presently she added: "I think they're away a lot, but I ain't sure."

"I know," I ventured, "they are home very seldom, and then only in the daytime — and you know it."

She didn't deny it, so I asked: "Are they in now?"

"I don't think so."

"Let's take a look at the joint," I suggested to Dean.

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He nodded and told the woman: "Take us up to their apartment an' unlock the door for us."

"I won't!" she said with sharp emphasis. "You got no right goin' into folks' homes unless you got a search-warrant. You got one?"

"We got nothin'," Dean grinned at her, "but we can get plenty if you want to put us to the trouble. You run this house; you can go into any of the flats any time you want, an' you can take us in. Take us up, an' we'll lay off you; but if you're going to put us to a lot of trouble, then you'll take your chances of bein' tied up with the Quirks, an' maybe sharin' a cell with 'em. Think that over."

She thought it over, and then, grumbling and growling with each step, took us up to the Quirks' apartment.

She made sure they weren't at home, then admitted us.

The apartment consisted of three rooms, a bath, and a kitchen, furnished in the shabby fashion that the ramshackle exterior of the building had prepared us for. In these rooms we found a few articles of masculine and feminine clothing, toilet accessories, and so on. But the place had none of the marks of a permanent abode; there were no pictures, no cushions, none of the dozens of odds and ends of personal belongings that are usually found in homes. The kitchen had the appearance of long disuse; the interiors of the coffee, tea, spice, and flour containers were clean.

Two things we found that meant something: A handful of Elixir Russian cigarettes on a table; and a new box of .32 cartridges — ten of which were missing — in a dresser drawer.

All through our searching the landlady hovered over us, her pale eyes sharp and curious; but now we chased her out, telling her that, law or no law, we were taking charge of the apartment.

"This was or is a hide-out for Whitacre and his woman all right, all right," Dean said when we were alone. "The only question is whether he intended to lay low here or whether it was just a place where he made preparations for his get-away. I reckon the best thing is to have the Captain put a man in here night and day until we turn up Brother Whitacre."

"That's safest," I agreed, and he went to the telephone in the front room to arrange it.

After Dean was through phoning, I called up the Old Man to see if anything new had developed.

"Nothing new," he told me. "How are you coming along?"

"Nicely. Maybe I'll have news for you this evening."

"Did you get those specimens of Whitacre's writing from Ogburn? Or shall I have someone else take care of it?"

"I'll get them this evening," I promised.

I wasted ten minutes trying to reach Ogburn at his office before I looked at my watch and saw that it

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was after six o'clock. I found his residence listed in the telephone directory, and called him there.

"Have you anything in Whitacre's writing at home?" I asked. "I want to get a couple of samples — would like to get them this evening, though if necessary I can wait until tomorrow."

"I think I have some of his letters here. If you come over now I'll give them to you."

"Be with you in fifteen minutes," I told him.

"I'm going down to Ogburn's," I told Dean, "to get some of Whitacre's scribbling while you're waiting for your man to come from Headquarters to take charge of this place. I'll meet you at the States as soon as you can get away. We'll eat there, and make our plans for the night."

"Uh-huh," he grunted, making himself comfortable in one chair, with his feet on another, as I let myself out.

Ogburn was dressing when I reached his apartment, and had his collar and tie in his hand when he came to the door to let me in.

"I found quite a few of Herb's letters," he said as we walked back to his bedroom.

I looked through the fifteen or more letters that lay on a table, selecting the ones I wanted, while Ogburn went on with his dressing.

"How are you progressing?" he asked presently.

"So-so. Heard anything that might help?"

"No, but just a few minutes ago I happened to remember that Herb used to go over to the Mills Building quite frequently. I've seen him going in and out often, but never thought anything of it. I don't know whether it is of any importance or ——"

I jumped out of my chair.

"That does it!" I cried. "Can I use your phone?"

"Certainly. It's in the hallway, near the door." He looked at me in surprise. "It's a slot phone; have you a nickel in change?"

"Yes." I was going through the bedroom door.

"The switch is near the door," he called after me, "if you want a light. Do you think ——"

But I didn't stop to listen to his questions. I was making for the telephone, searching my pockets for a nickel. And, fumbling hurriedly with the nickel, I muffed it — not entirely by accident, for I had a hunch that I wanted to work out. The nickel rolled away down the carpeted hallway. I switched on the light, recovered the nickel, and called the "Quirks' " number. I'm glad I played that hunch.

Dean was still there.

"That joint's dead," I sang. "Take the landlady down to Headquarters, and grab the Landis woman, too. I'll meet you there — at Headquarters."

"You mean it?" he rumbled.

"Almost," I said, and hung up the receiver.

I switched off the hall light and, whistling a little tune to myself, walked back to the room where I had

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left Ogburn. The door was not quite closed. I walked straight up to it, kicked it open with one foot, and jumped back, hugging the wall.

Two shots — so close together that they were almost one — crashed.

Flat against the wall, I pounded my feet against the floor and wainscot, and let out a medley of shrieks and groans that would have done credit to a carnival wild-man.

A moment later Ogburn appeared in the doorway, a revolver in his hand, his face wolfish. He was determined to kill me. It was my life or his, so ——

I slammed my gun down on the sleek, brown top of his head.

When he opened his eyes, two policemen were lifting him into the back of a patrol-wagon.

I found Dean in the detectives' assembly-room in the Hall of Justice.

"The landlady identifies Mae Landis as Mrs. Quirk," he said. "Now what?"

"Where is she now?"

"One of the policewomen is holding both of them in the Captain's office."

"Ogburn is over in the Pawnshop Detail office," I told him. "Let's take the landlady in for a look at him."

Ogburn sat leaning forward, holding his head in his hands and staring sullenly at the feet of the uniformed man who guarded him, when we took the gaunt landlady in to see him.

"Ever see him before?" I asked her.

"Yes" — reluctantly — "that's Mr. Quirk."

Ogburn didn't look up, and he paid not the least attention to any of us.

After we had told the landlady that she could go home, Dean led me back to a far corner of the assembly-room, where we could talk without disturbance.

"Now spill it!" he burst out. "How come all the startling developments, as the newspaper boys call 'em?"

"Well, first-off, I knew that the question *Who killed Bob Teal?* could have only one answer. Bob wasn't a boob! He might possibly have let a man he was trailing lure him behind a row of billboards on a dark night, but he would have gone prepared for trouble. He wouldn't have died with empty hands, from a gun that was close enough to scorch his coat. The murderer *had* to be somebody Bob trusted, so it couldn't be Whitacre. Now Bob was a conscientious sort of lad, and he wouldn't have stopped shadowing Whitacre to go over and talk with some friend. There was only one man who could have persuaded him to drop Whitacre for a while, and that one man was the one he was working for — Ogburn.

"If I hadn't known Bob, I might have thought he had hidden behind the billboards to watch Whitacre; but Bob wasn't an amateur. He knew better than to pull any of that spectacular gumshoe stuff. So there was nothing to it but Ogburn!

"With that to go on, the rest was ducksoup. All the stuff Mae Landis gave us — identifying the gun as Whitacre's, and giving Ogburn an alibi by saying she had talked to him

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on the phone at ten o'clock — only convinced me that she and Ogburn were working together. When the landlady described 'Quirk' for us, I was fairly certain of it. Her description would fit either Whitacre or Ogburn, but there was no sense to Whitacre's having the apartment on Greenwich Street, while if Ogburn and the Landis woman were thick, they'd need a meeting-place of some sort. The rest of the box of cartridges there helped some too.

"Then to-night I put on a little act in Ogburn's apartment, chasing a nickel along the floor and finding traces of dried mud that had escaped the cleaning-up he no doubt gave the carpet and clothes after he came home from walking through the lot in the rain. We'll let the experts decide whether it *could* be mud from the lot on which Bob was killed, and the jury can decide whether it *is*.

"There are a few more odds and ends — like the gun. The Landis woman said Whitacre had had it for more than a year, but in spite of being muddy it looks fairly new to me. We'll send the serial number to the factory, and find when it was turned out.

"For motive, just now all I'm sure of is the woman, which should be enough. But I think that when Ogburn & Whitacre's books are audited, and their finances sifted, we'll find something there. What I'm banking on strong is that Whitacre will come in, now that he is cleared of the murder charge."

And that is exactly what happened.

Next day Herbert Whitacre walked into Police Headquarters at Sacramento and surrendered.

Neither Ogburn nor Mae Landis ever told what they knew, but with Whitacre's testimony, supported by what we were able to pick up here and there, we went into court when the time came and convinced the jury that the facts were these:

Ogburn and Whitacre had opened their farm development business as a plain swindle. They had options on a lot of land, and they planned to sell as many shares in their enterprise as possible before the time came to exercise their options. Then they intended packing up their bags and disappearing. Whitacre hadn't much nerve, and he had a clear remembrance of the three years he had served in prison for forgery; so, to bolster his courage, Ogburn had told his partner that he had a friend in the Post Office Department in Washington, D. C., who would tip him off the instant any official suspicion was aroused.

The two partners made a neat little pile out of their venture, Ogburn taking charge of the money until the time came for the split-up. Meanwhile Ogburn and Mae Landis — Whitacre's supposed wife — had become intimate, and had rented the apartment on Greenwich Street, meeting there afternoons when Whitacre was busy at the office, and when Ogburn was supposed to be out hunting fresh victims. In this apartment Ogburn and the woman had hatched their little

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scheme, whereby they were to get rid of Whitacre, keep all the loot, and clear Ogburn of criminal complicity in the affairs of Ogburn & Whitacre.

Ogburn had come into the Continental Office and told his little tale of his partner's dishonesty, engaging Bob Teal to shadow him. Then he had told Whitacre that he had received a tip from his friend in Washington that an investigation was about to be made. The two partners planned to leave town on their separate ways the following week. The next night Mae Landis told Whitacre she had seen a man loitering in the neighborhood, apparently watching the building in which they lived. Whitacre — thinking Bob a Post Office Inspector — had gone completely to pieces, and it had taken the combined efforts of the woman and his partner — apparently working separately — to keep him from bolting immediately. They had persuaded him to stick it out another few days.

On the night of the murder, Ogburn, pretending skepticism of Whitacre's story about being followed, had met Whitacre for the purpose of learning if he really was being shadowed. They had walked the streets in the rain for an hour. Then Ogburn, convinced, had announced his intention of going back and talking to the supposed Post Office Inspector, to see if he could be bribed. Whitacre had refused to accompany his partner, but had agreed to wait for him in a dark doorway.

Ogburn had taken Bob Teal over behind the billboards on some pretext, and had murdered him. Then he had hurried back to his partner, crying: "My God! He grabbed me and I shot him. We'll have to leave!"

Whitacre, in blind panic, had left San Francisco without stopping for his bags or even notifying Mae Landis. Ogburn was supposed to leave by another route. They were to meet in Oklahoma City ten days later, where Ogburn — after getting the loot out of the Los Angeles banks, where he had deposited it under various names — was to give Whitacre his share, and after that they were to part for good.

In Sacramento next day Whitacre had read the newspapers, and had understood what had been done to him. He had done all the bookkeeping; all the false entries in Ogburn & Whitacre's books were in his writing. Mae Landis had revealed his former criminal record, and had fastened the ownership of the gun — really Ogburn's — upon him. He was framed completely! He hadn't a chance of clearing himself.

He had known that his story would sound like a far-fetched and flimsy lie; he had a criminal record. For him to have surrendered and told the truth would have been merely to get himself laughed at.

As it turned out, Ogburn went to the gallows, Mae Landis is now serving a fifteen-year sentence, and Whitacre, in return for his testimony and restitution of the loot, was not prosecuted for his share in the swindle.

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EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

ABOUT THE STORY: *In* ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY *Robert Burton wrote: "No rule is so general, which admits not some exception." Yes, even in editorial plans. . . . You will remember we laid down a rule governing all editorial comments on EQMM's prize-winning stories of 1947. That rule was simply this: to precede each story with a short introduction devoted exclusively to biographical data on the author and bibliographical data on the author's work; and to follow each story with a longer editorial postscript devoted to an analysis of the story's plot or to the circumstances under which the story was conceived and written or to some other phase of the creative history. Now, to prove the rule, we make an exception in the case of T. S. Stribling's "The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone," and give you all the editorial comment ahead of the story. The exception is justified on two counts: first, no introduction of the author is really necessary — T. S. Stribling, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of such outstanding novels as* THE FORGE, THE STORE, *and* UNFINISHED CATHEDRAL, *is one of the best-known among contemporary American writers; second, the author himself has written an Introductory Note to "The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone" which is too interesting to pass up. So here is the author's own preface, and immediately following it, our own editorial comment . . .*

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I accumulated the notes on "The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone" in the ancient city of Tacuba, Mexico, and spent considerable time trying to string them into a proper mystery story. I'll mention here my method of writing mysteries. I take any batch of unexplained facts and try to invent some sort of clue which might run through and connect them into one complete mystery. Sometimes no such explanation is possible —then I have wasted my time and labor. That happened in Tacuba. I was so disgusted that I took the results of several weeks of effort and tossed it into our wastebasket.*

I left our hotel, the Reina de Espagna, and took a long walk out in the city to get over my frustration. Tacuba possesses three hundred and sixty-five churches, and I had intended to make that fact one of the points of my mystery — if I could have managed it. It would have been such an unexpected detail in a detective story.

I took my walk, looked at some of the churches, and when I returned to our sitting-room, Poggioli was at his desk. I was amazed when he looked up and said, "I want to congratulate you. This is by far the best story you've ever done." Then I saw that he had my notes. I asked him if he had fished them out of the wastebasket. He said no — he had found them on

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his desk; he supposed I had put them there for him to read. Then I said it must have been Belita, our maid, who had rescued the notes. She probably had thought they were his, Poggioli's, work, and had fallen off his desk accidentally. My friend asked why the notes were in the wastebasket at all.

"Well," I replied, "I can't think of any explanation to hold the incidents together."

"Explanation!" ejaculated Poggioli. "You don't need an explanation! That's the trouble with you mystery writers — you think you need long-winded explanations at the end of your stories. Fortunately, this story needs none: it flows in perfect sequence, with complete clarity, and the end, while not a surprise to me, should startle many readers."

I stood looking at my notes, considering what he said.

"Then you'd send them on to 'Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine' — as they are?"

"I certainly would," said Poggioli.

So I did . . .

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The story is told how Rudyard Kipling once sat at his desk and wrote the poem called "Recessional"; how he read over his handiwork and found it not to his liking; how he tossed the manuscript into his wastebasket and thereafter forgot it; how Mrs. Kipling noticed the sheets of paper in the basket, fished them out, read her husband's work, and found it very good indeed; and how she persuaded her husband to offer "Recessional" for publication. Thus, one of Kipling's acknowledged masterpieces was saved from oblivion.*

History has a habit of repeating itself — even literary history. In the case of "The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone," however, it took two people to perform a service similar to Mrs. Kipling's — thus saving one of T. S. Stribling's finest stories from oblivion. First, Belita the maidservant rescued the manuscript from the wastebasket; then Professor Poggioli persuaded Mr. Stribling to mail the original notes to EQMM.

When your Editor finished reading the story, he promptly sent a telegram to Mr. Stribling urging him to enter "The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone" in EQMM's Second Annual Contest. Mr. Stribling consented, and the story won a Second Prize.

Of course, Professor Poggioli was right all the time. Some readers may not agree with the Professor that "The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone" is Mr. Stribling's best story, but we would be enormously surprised

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if all readers do not agree that it is one of his best. Speaking as objectively as it is within our power to do so, we make the flat statement that Mr. Stribling's tale of murder at a Mexican cock fight is one of the most fascinating ever to come to our desk, and despite its ancient Aztec background, one of the most modern *tales of detection ever conceived.*

THE MYSTERY OF THE 81ST KILOMETER STONE

By T. S. STRIBLING

Poggioli and I arrived in Tacuba last night. This Sunday morning we were aroused by multitudinous church bells ringing in all directions. Mexican church bells ring very fast, like village fire alarms. To the old-fashioned orthodox churchmen they were, in a way, just that. I called to Poggioli from my bed, "Hear that? You realize now they have three hundred and sixty-five churches in this town, one for every day in the year."

Poggioli lifted his head and said around a yawn, "No, they don't . . . days of the year have nothing to do with it."

"There's three hun—"

"I understand that. But those churches were built to mask Aztec temples. That was their real purpose — not a church for every day in the year. Now, the Aztecs undoubtedly erected three hundred and sixty-five temples, one for each day in the year —"

Such hair-splitting annoyed me. "Isn't that the same thing?"

"Is it the same thing for one man to build an airplane to go somewhere and another to wreck it so he can't get there?"

I made no answer to this. It was just some more of Poggioli's habitual, college-professor's sarcasm. I asked him presently why he supposed the Aztecs had a temple for every day in the year. He said that was what he had come to Tacuba to investigate.

From the piazza of the Reina de Espagna, the hotel where we lodge, Poggioli and I watch the crowds stream by to mass and to the cock-fights. On the wall of an ancient church across the *calle* I can see the advertisement of a bull fight. Poggioli philosophizes on the connection between religious rites and fights. He wonders if it is possible that the cock-pit and bull ring are halfway houses between old Aztec ritual and present-day worship? The old Spanish conquistadors were extraordinarily practical men. They took what they found

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in the Indians, physical and spiritual, and moulded it into something viable. We English in the North eradicated our autochthons, saving nothing, either physical or spiritual.

In the crowd an old peon in a red blanket hurries past holding under his arm a grey gamecock. Poggioli comments on the accidental stylistic perfection of this composition. Had the colors been reversed — blanket grey, cock red — stress would have fallen on the fowl, not on the peon. As it is, there is something arresting, even startling, in the old man's tortured face. However, it may be that the old cockfighter is not tortured at all. That is simply the way old Mexican Indians look, as is proved by the canvasses of Orozco and Rivera.

Presently Poggioli asked me why I supposed the crowd was in such a hurry. I said I didn't know. Poggioli continued with his coffee and presently Belita came out to the hotel's sidewalk tables with more rolls. The criminologist asked her the same question. She began impulsively, "*Ca, Señor*, the moon is full to—" then seemed to catch herself and finished casually, "They are always in a hurry . . . the peons."

This last was so funny that when she went inside I began laughing. For some reason Poggioli was not at all amused. He looked after the old Indian with the grey cock who was just disappearing around a church corner.

"I wonder what Belita is concealing," he said slowly. "What could she possibly want to hide from us, a pair of perfectly haphazard tourists. . . ."

"Why, a crime," I said, "certainly a crime!" I began laughing at Poggioli because that man can twist the slightest, the most trivial, *lapsus lingua* that anybody makes into a remote but unerring clue to some sort of crime. It's a mania with him.

Poggioli paid little attention to my satire. He finished his coffee, got up. "Let's walk to the cockfights."

"I thought you came here to study religion," I replied.

"I did," he said, "but who knows — their religion may begin with cockfights."

"Now, why make a rationalization like that?" I demanded.

"The moon," said Poggioli. "Belita's accidental, but truthful and immediately corrected reference to the moon, and the further fact that the old Aztecs did have a lunar religion."

Since I make my living out of Poggioli, writing down his dull and pompous efforts at satire along with his criminological deductions, I finished my coffee and followed.

There is no use describing a Mexican cockfight; the circle of tense aficionados, binding on the gyves, pitting the birds, the tragic momentary flutter of two utterly fearless little creatures and the death of one or both. I wouldn't describe it if I could. But this time Poggioli called my attention to the tenseness, the air of expectancy — I might almost say, apprehension — that seemed to hang over the crowd; not only in the midst of a

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fight but between duels. It was a constant. Poggioli asked me what I made of it. I said, "Heaven knows I don't know. What do *you* make of it?"

He gave a little shrug and said, "As a rule tension is relieved by some expected dénouement."

The Indians had loads of cocks, all of them wanting to fight. They reminded me of military organizations. We again saw our old Indian with the red blanket and the grey fighter. His face was still in tortured wrinkles but so were most of the other faces. His must have meant nothing at all. I presently quit noticing our particular peon because there was a tall, dark, aquiline man by the cockpit who gradually became for me the center of the crowd. Everybody knows what I mean. There is always one person who becomes the personification of the crowd. Different spectators pick different persons for their "centers." I often choose a fat round man or a beautiful woman as my barometer, and I keep glancing at him or her to see how the show goes. This time, however, it was this tall, Romanesque sort of man, not exactly gloomy but certainly not cheerful.

Eventually, our peon pitted his cock against another. The two birds flickered through their usual passes. I glanced up at my Romanesque Indian to judge by his expression how the fight was progressing, because I really knew nothing about the sport. When I looked back again, the other rooster was down and our grey one was crowing. I felt a certain relief that our old peon had won, for I assumed that the possible loss of the fight was what had given him such an anxious, tortured face. I saw him stoop to pick up his excited cock when the bird leaped upward and fluttered a moment over his wrist.

I hardly noticed this manœuvre of the fighting fowl; it didn't occur to me that it could mean anything; but a kind of sigh, a sort of tense exhalation, arose from the spectators. Poggioli beside me said in an undertone, "So that's what the crowd was waiting for."

"Waiting for what?" I asked.

"That cock cut the old man's arm as he picked it up."

I looked and sure enough, I saw blood dripping from our peon's wrist. The old man stood looking at the wound the bird had inflicted with one of its gyves. The sight somehow gave me a queer feeling. I said, "How could the crowd be waiting for that when they couldn't have known it was going to happen?" Poggioli lifted a hand to express his own ignorance.

I kept looking and finally I said, "Isn't the old fellow going to do anything about it? He's hurt badly enough to make a splotch there on the ground." But he didn't do anything, just stood looking at his arm; everybody else was watching it, too. Finally I pushed my way through the crowd to the old man. I had in mind that I at least would do something for him because, in a way, he was mine and Poggioli's peon. We had, you might say, artistically adopted him.

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When I got to him I was shocked at his yellow, clayey face and bloodless lips, and his wrist was still bleeding. The old fellow sat down. I pulled out my handkerchief and picked up a little stick off the ground — to improvise a tourniquet. As I knotted my cloth and bent over, a hand on my shoulder drew me back and a calm but severe and positive baritone voice said in blurry Spanish, "*El ley, Señor,*" . . . the law, *Señor.* The man who had stopped me was our Roman senator in copper.

Then I realized there must be some sort of law in Mexico analagous to our own law about wounded motorists. Our law says that nobody can assist one of them without becoming responsible for his death, if he dies. The strict legal procedure is to wait for an ambulance. If there is no ambulance coming, one just waits. That was what this crowd was doing. I started back to our hotel. If I couldn't do anything, I didn't want to be there.

Poggioli joined me on the outskirts of the crowd. "Why in the world did you think you could stop something the whole crowd had been waiting for?" I asked.

Poggioli lifted a shoulder with a kind of logical reproach in his tone. "You saw the crowd waiting for something to happen . . . this happened . . . suddenly the suspense was over. Since the crowd was obviously waiting for him to be wounded, then letting him alone after his mishap must be customary."

"Poggioli," I said, "there is nothing wrong with your reasoning if I admit the cock spurring the old man was a part of the program — but that's impossible."

"Which do you consider the more convincing? — your logic or the reaction of the whole crowd?"

As I had no answer, I asked him what was his explanation of a large group of sportsmen actually feeling relief when one of their number got hurt. He said he didn't know, that somehow it might link with Belita's hesitancy in answering our question that morning as to why the crowd was hurrying. I broke into incredulous laughter at the thought that Belita's boggling over a very simple question could possibly have any connection with this rooster cutting the old peon's artery. There was no link conceivable between the two incidents.

(I jot these things down in my notes just as they happened; I don't believe they can ever take on a story form.)

We didn't see Belita again until next morning, when she brought coffee to our room. She seemed gay and uplifted, as if she had been delivered from evil. Poggioli asked in a casual tone, "Belita, the old peon died yesterday, didn't he?"

"*Si, Señor.*"

"Belita, is that why you seem so relieved this morning?"

The girl stared at him antagonistically: "Why should I seem relieved, *Señor,* at poor old Juan's death?"

This evening we went to Swilly Bill's night club for dinner. It caters

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particularly to American tourists but everybody goes. There are similar spots in all the larger Mexican towns, called variously, Sloppy Joe's, Swilly Bill's, Messy Mat's, and so on. Whether these clubs are named to attract Americans or to express their owner's opinion of Americans, I don't know. All have jazz bands manned by Mexicans and these bands play under artificial palms made of cork, even when real palms grow all around the place. I suppose it is to make the Americans feel at home. And the Americans all gather there to see native life and the Mexicans come to see American life. This gives both a pleasant sense of superiority.

I often take my chessmen to the night clubs and after I have eaten, I set them up on my table and nearly always get a game. Tonight I was not disappointed. A Mexican gentleman in modish English clothes stopped at our table and with a gesture indicated my men. I am sure he knew by my appearance that I couldn't speak Spanish. I nodded an invitation for him to have a seat and concealed a black and a white pawn in my hands for him to choose a color. As I looked fully into his face, I received a queer shock. The fellow was the Roman-senator peon who had been the "center" of my crowd at the cockfight.

Naturally it surprised me that a man who wore a blanket at one place should appear in very stylish attire at the night club, but surprise wasn't the core of my emotion. It was uneasiness; it was some vague kind of apprehension; what of, I did not know.

Now I like riddles and problems; that is why I play chess and write mysteries; but I don't like them to backfire on me. And this man impressed me, both at the cockfight and here at the chess table, as an excellent person to let alone. Behind this feeling was not only the Mexican's grim appearance but the fact that he really had stopped me from saving the life of the old Indian with the grey cock. He was heartless — I could see that much in his face.

As we played, I was eager for Poggioli to notice my opponent. I kept glancing at the criminologist, trying to catch his eye, but my friend seemed to be immersed in some problem of his own.

Naturally, under all these stresses, I lost the game. Our Roman-senator arose and bowed his thanks with the dignity that all Mexicans possess, and then walked away from our table toward the street, in the direction of the Mexican orchestra under the artificial palms.

The moment he was out of hearing I whispered to Poggioli, "Did you see who that man was?" He asked who, and I said, "Why, the peon — the old Roman peon at the cockfight! Here he is coming to the night club dressed like a politician in a silk-stocking ward!"

Poggioli nodded. "They do look alike."

"Look alike! They're the same man!"

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"Mm-mm . . . no-o . . . different aura."

"What do you mean . . . aura?" I said.

"Oh, personality . . . atmosphere . . . impression. That something about every man which you can feel but can't see."

"It was his English clothes," I said, "which threw you off."

Poggioli dismissed our argument with a wave of his finger. "The point about him that we've got to decide is something else entirely. Why does he want to see *me*?"

I stopped placing my chessmen back in their box. "See *you*?"

"Yes. You saw him, didn't you, signal me to follow him out in the street?"

"Why, no-o! Did he? I watched him walk away. That's all he did."

"Yes, true enough, but in what direction did he walk?"

"Toward the jazz band," I said.

"There you are — toward the jazz band," repeated Poggioli, with the satisfaction of a wrangler who has made his opponent concede a point. "You certainly admit that is a signal to me to follow him outside?"

I just sat and looked at Poggioli. I hadn't the remotest idea what he was driving at. So he went on. "He walked toward the jazz band. Now do people ordinarily, when they leave a club like this, depart in the direction of the music?"

"No, I don't suppose they do. So what?"

"And especially if it were disagreeable music — harsh, dissonant music — in fact, not music at all, just braying, for that is what American jazz is to these Mexicans. For a Mexican to have got up and . . . walked . . . toward . . . such . . . music. . . . What must that have meant?"

I tried to think of something deep but finally I had to say, "He wanted to get out and go home."

Poggioli gave the brief, hopeless laugh that he uses in his class at Ohio State University. "Now, listen," he said, "I'll analyze his action. He knew that if I were the psychologist that I am reputed to be I would notice his leaving in precisely the opposite direction he would normally take. If he wanted my attention that badly, he could easily have spoken to me here at the table, but he didn't do it. By saying nothing and walking in the direction of the jazz music he accomplished two things: he tested me to see if I really were an acute, sensitive psychologist, and secondly, it told me of his dire — I might almost say, desperate — need for the assistance of such a trained psychologist."

"Poggioli," I said, "would you mind telling me, as a friend, what you are talking about?"

"I am saying that man, for some reason, did not want to ask me in so many words to come outside with him; so he gave me a very subtle signal which no one but a psychologist would catch. I therefore analyze him as a highly educated man of great sensitivity. Furthermore, he must have some enemy here in the club

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tonight from whom he wants to conceal his meeting with me; otherwise, he would simply have asked me to go home with him. He is standing outside the club building now waiting to see if I will follow him."

I can hardly express my feeling for such a fantastic notion. The idea of deducing all this rigmarole because a man walked out of a night club in the direction of the jazz band! I told Poggioli flatfooted what I thought of the matter. He said he wouldn't have dreamed of placing such an interpretation on the fellow's action if it had not been for the other things that have been happening. I asked him what other things. He said the peon getting killed at the cockfight and Belita's shifting her reasons when questioned that morning. I said to him, "Poggioli, you are trying to string together things that have no earthly connection."

"Possibly, possibly," agreed the psychologist, "but sometimes I find that a number of inexplicable details link together and make a quite explicable whole. That's my only reason for . . ."

"All right," I interrupted, "to prove you are completely wrong in this instance, I'm going outside and see if the man is waiting for you."

Poggioli pursed his lips in doubt. "I had thought of that myself, but I came down here for rest, not work, and besides I am sure neither of us wants to incur any personal danger."

I couldn't help smiling at that.

"The old peon with the cock got killed," recalled Poggioli gravely.

"Then what are we supposed to do?" I asked. "Go to a cockfight and get ourselves killed?"

"No, no, certainly not," he said soberly, "it wouldn't be *that* method."

"You sound as if somebody had hundreds of different methods of inflicting . . ."

"You'll simply have to wait," advised my friend, "until enough of these incidents occur for us to construct a theory around them, and . . . we don't want to be one of the incidents ourselves."

Now, I remembered that Poggioli's theories, grotesque as some of them are, always seem to work out. So I sat looking at him and pondering. Heaven knows I don't court personal danger, but if there is a story in the thing . . .

"Poggioli," I said, "as a favor to me will you permit me to follow that man and see if he is really waiting out in the street?"

"Mm-mm . . . I hate to become involved even as a counselor in an affair like this . . . completely outside the psychology of our Anglo-Saxon civilization. Oh, go ahead . . . it may fit in with my own researches . . ."

If I hadn't been almost positive that Poggioli had imagined a mare's-nest, I don't believe I would have gone. For him to attribute such subtlety to a man who couldn't even speak English amused me. I know it's provincial to think like that, but we Americans do feel that if a man doesn't speak our language, he can't be so very brilliant, and it would take

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a genius to signal Poggioli in any such fashion as he had imagined. So I got up and walked to the door behind the orchestra, rather amused at the futility of my own gesture. Still it would show Poggioli how far astray his deductions could wander, which would be an indirect feather in my cap. I was still smiling when I opened the door and stepped out into the street.

There stood the man on the narrow sidewalk looking at the moon.

I came within a squeak of closing the door and walking back inside again. The thought flashed across my mind: "Poggioli's string of deductions is correct . . . this fellow is connected with the cock murder, Belita's guilty conscience, and our own danger." Then came the thought: "What a story this will make if I ever get an explanation for it!" So I walked on.

Yes, there he stood on the two-foot sidewalk looking up at the moon between the spires of the cathedral. The moment I appeared he started away; but in his going he walked so close to me that he touched me — in fact, he slipped a bit of paper in my hand. Then he disappeared around the corner. Neither of us said a word.

It was all so impossible that I just stood there for two or three minutes, looking at the moon above the church, with all sorts of vague fantasies floating through my head. I turned and went back inside to Poggioli. As I approached him at the table, he lifted a brow at me. I nodded. He took the note without a word and opened it. To our surprise it was in English:

"Dr. Henry Poggioli, Esteemed Sir,

I have a request to make of you which is vital to me. I stand in great need of the assistance of a psychologist. It means life or death to me. Will you have the great kindness to meet me tonight at two fifty-eight o'clock at the eighty-first kilometer stone? P.S. Read this note once, then destroy it."

We sat and looked at each other. Then Poggioli drew out a cigarette lighter, flipped it open, and burned the note.

"Why that?" I asked.

"Why a kilometer stone at two fifty-eight o'clock at night?" said Poggioli. He pulled at his bluish chin for a moment in thought, then said, "Well, let's get going."

We turned out of Swilly Bill's, walked to our taxicab, and woke Pancho in the driver's seat. Poggioli glanced at his watch and told our driver that we were due at the eighty-first kilometer stone in exactly sixteen minutes.

"*Si, Si, Señores.*" Pancho jumped out and began to crank his jalopy. In the midst of his preparations, he suddenly straightened and asked as if he had not heard right. "Where did you say you were going, *Señor?*"

Poggioli repeated: "To the eighty-first kilometer stone."

Pancho did not resume his tinkering. He put his hands on his radiator. "*Señores* . . . it is nothing to me, *certainamente*, but . . . but *porque?*

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Why would you want to go to . . ."

"To tell you the truth, Pancho," said Poggioli, "we don't know."

"You don't know?"

"We haven't the slightest idea."

"Hadn't I better take you back to the hotel, *Señores?*"

"No, the eighty-first. . . ."

Pancho thumped his radiator in regret. "*Señor*, I remember now. . . . I am so sorry . . . but I took out my spark plugs to clean them when we first came to this night club . . . then I sat down and went to sleep. . . ."

"Pancho, where are your spark plugs?" asked my friend.

Our little man looked about aimlessly in the semi-darkness. "I took them out. . . . I laid them. . . . I wonder if somebody stole them while I was asleep!" His loss seemed not to disturb him; he pointed down a glimmering *calle*. "Why don't the *Señores* walk? It isn't very far and you will have a light to walk by — the moon goes down at two fifty-eight tonight."

He eyed us obliquely as he made this last observation. If he were looking for some sign from us, he was disappointed because neither of us knew anything.

Now, when a Mexican chauffeur turns down an American fare, something is seriously wrong. Poggioli and I walked on down toward kilometer stone eighty-one, speculating on what it could be. I could hear my friend repeating to himself in an undertone the links in our problem . . . expectant crowd . . . game cock murder . . . servant girl knew something . . . chess player . . . chauffeur quits . . . moon goes down. . . . Of course, the trouble was that he had no assurance that these incidents really were connected. They might not be incidents at all, just accidents. I spoke aloud as we walked past one after another of the dark mysterious churches. "You think Pancho was afraid to come with us?"

"Mm — mm, it could be fear, or it could be fidelity to some religious faith or superstition. Most likely, fear."

I picked a flaw here. I said, "You bring in religious faith and superstition only because you are studying the old Aztec religion."

"Certainly. I realize any habitual train of thought tends to corrupt logical judgment. An ideal detective, I am sure, would be a man who never had an idea in his head about anything." This last was probably academic sarcasm. I was framing a suitable retort when we reached the end of the city. Mexican cities do not straggle off into suburbs as do our American towns. They end as definitely as a loaf of bread. We had come to the end of town, the *calle* turned into a *camino*, and just a little way beyond where the houses stopped and the street changed into a road, I saw the glimmer of the eighty-first kilometer stone.

Beside it stood our chess player. Before we actually joined him the moon sank and left us in the velvety star-shot darkness of a tropical night.

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Poggioli whispered to me, "Remember this: it was arranged, it will fit in somehow." That was all he had time to say. He referred, I think, to the moon-set.

The man in the gloom greeted us in excellent English and still more surprisingly, spoke with an Oxford accent. Why hadn't he talked to me over the chess game in Swilly Bill's? This was just one of the many riddles our conversation with him developed. I am sorry I cannot reproduce our entire talk, but it was a black night and I couldn't even see the pad on which I attempted to make notes. The best I could manage were brief sentences summarizing the different subjects the two men discussed. Later in our hotel I expanded some of these from memory. Here is the list:

1. Power of the suggestion of death.

The fellow introduced this theme into what seemed to be a purely impersonal conversation between two scientific men. Poggioli's observation was this, and it struck me as a good one. "To suggest death to a man might lead to serious illness. It would be impossible, however, really to produce death because as the mind weakened its own power of lethal suggestion would decrease; so, on the very brink of death, the mind would become inert and the body would continue to live."

The unseen man said, "That's assuming that what men call the soul is simply a function of the body, not a separate entity." I agreed to this. "Then if suggestion can slay a man," went on the unseen speaker, "would not that tend to prove the independence and possible continuity of the soul?"

I answered that the mere suggestion of a soul was so far removed from American materialistic thinking that I would not attempt to follow him in that realm of speculation.

2. The next theme I have on my list was a discussion between Poggioli and the man on "soul energy," whatever that may mean. The man in the dark drew a macabre analogy between the development of energy through the destruction of the atom, and the possible use of energy through the destruction of the human soul. He suggested ascending gradations of power — simple matter as we know it, molecules, atoms, electrons and protons, soul. And he pointed out that the human will or the human soul could perform labor at a distance without actual physical contact. This was as dramatic an advance over atomic power as atomic was over molecular power. In proof of this "soul power" he cited experiments recently performed with dice at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. There it was proved that the unaided human will could influence the fall of dice. Here I interposed to say that the fall of a die was such a trivial exhibition of power. He agreed to that but pointed out that for decades scientists had known of atomic power only through enormously magnified photographs of liberated ions. Comparing

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that to controlling the roll of a die would be like comparing a feather with the weight of the earth. Which, of course, as queer as it may sound, is perfectly true. Then he went on to press the point that this "mind force" operated at a distance, without contact, lifting it completely above our ordinary conception of energy into a realm new and unexplored by Western science.

Of course, that too was true, but I didn't see what all this was leading to.

Then he spoke of the fertility of the Mexican land, how it had borne crop after crop for unnumbered centuries, whereas the soil in America required fertilizers and some of it was already abandoned as nonproductive. All this had nothing to do with the mystery in hand; it is every citizen's right to praise his own country and decry other lands.

The man in the darkness drifted next into local history. He mentioned again Tacuba's three hundred and sixty-five churches, and the fact that they were built to cover up old Aztec temples. On the heels of this statement he related a very queer story. He said all monastic institutions had been banned in Mexico by law ever since the days of Juarez. However, a nunnery had managed to exist in Pueblo, Mexico, through all those years. It was camouflaged by shops and houses and was discovered accidentally by a police officer who put his hand on an oil painting which in reality was a bell cord at the entrance of the nunnery. A door opened in a blank wall and the abbess appeared and asked him what he wanted.

Finally our host — I suppose I might call him our host, since he invited us to meet him at the kilometer stone — asked Poggioli in a very serious voice if Western psychology had developed any defense against the power of suggestion.

"No mental defense," said Poggioli; "some physical defense, possibly, like a stimulant or a sedative. You see, Western psychology, in contradistinction to Eastern psychology, does not credit the existence of the soul. Its experiments are purely physical, conducted in laboratories with mechanical equipment. It contrives no defense against black magic and no aid of white magic because it does not believe in such things. Actually Western psychology stands in the grotesque position of a science built around a vacuum; a psychology without a psyche; or, in plain English, 'words about nothing.' "

Our host stood for a moment, silent in the darkness, and finally he asked, "And that is your scientific creed, too, Dr. Poggioli?"

"Certainly. I am a trained Western scientist."

On this completely irrelevant note our visit ended. The man bade us goodbye and Poggioli and I started back to our hotel. I must admit I was disappointed. I had nothing writable, no mystery story — just a faint suggestion of the eerie which is the Western reaction to the idea of soul; nothing by any stretch of the imagi-

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nation solid enough to mould into a mystery story saleable to the American public.

As I say, I was disappointed, and then, as a sort of sop to my typewriter, chance tossed me one little touch of the mysterious that is writable.

We were passing a Mexican cemetery. There was a hooded lantern in the brick wall above the iron gate, and just as we passed, the gate opened and who should walk out but the chess player we had just left behind us — the same dark, saturnine face. Now, however, he wore an ordinary peon's *serape* thrown around him, for the night was cool. It gave me a sort of start. I tried to recall whether he had worn the *serape* when he talked with us at the kilometer stone. I didn't remember it. Poggioli, of course, saw him too, and when the man passed, Poggioli said, "The cockfighter."

"Sure," I agreed, "and also the chess player."

"No," objected my friend. "Why would an educated man like that run ahead of us, appear in a cemetery's gate in a *serape* . . ."

"Didn't he have on a *serape* at the kilometer stone?" I asked.

Poggioli shrugged.

"Will you please tell me why he asked us to meet him at the kilometer stone at all?" I asked.

Poggioli turned and tried to see my face. "You don't know . . . when he told us just as plainly as he possibly could without using so many words?"

"What did he tell us?" I snapped in annoyance, "without using so many words?"

"He told us . . . Let me see . . . a lot of things: that there is still an old Aztec temple going full blast in Tacuba."

"For Heaven's sake, Poggioli, how did you ever . . ."

"Why should he have mentioned the nunnery hidden for decades in Pueblo if he hadn't meant . . ."

"That was just gossip," I said.

"That man would not gossip — not when he was trying to get some sort of magical formula to save somebody's life, possibly his own."

"Save his . . . why do you imagine that?"

"That's why he mentioned the richness of the Mexican land after centuries of cultivation. The priests at this Aztec temple still offer human sacrifices to the gods of fertility."

"But, Poggioli, that wouldn't have anything to do with the actual richness of the land!"

"Sure of that?"

"Certainly I am — that's the crudest superstition!"

"Of course, I think you are right. I'm an American the same as you . . . but think of the energy in an atomic bomb."

"*All right, I'm thinking of it.* What about it?"

"Try to imagine a subtler energy than that, a more refined energy, a something or other that doesn't require any physical contact whatever to operate on matter. Energy that will work at a distance just as effi-

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ciently as if brought in direct contact."

"You are now talking the same twaddle he was giving us about experiments with dice at Duke University."

"That's precisely what I am talking about. Imagine such a force, controlled, stepped up to the *n*th degree and then utilized for the enrichment of the soil of this country in what we would call savage fertility rites. . . ."

I made a gesture in the darkness. "Why, that's the most unbelievable —"

"Then why do you suppose the Aztec priests used to sacrifice thousands and thousands of human lives? It was brutal, repulsive work, but they stuck to it. Why? Only because they must have had proof that they were directing the concentrated soul power of hecatombs of victims into the fertilization of their soil . . . fertility rites. And they are still doing it! That old peon whom the cock killed . . . The whole crowd expected a victim; nobody knew who it would be; that was the reason for such enormous relief when the victim was finally revealed. The rest knew it would not be them."

I walked along in a daze. I felt sure that Poggioli was wrong this time. "That copper-colored Roman — he didn't kill the peon himself," I objected.

"I think he did — not with an obsidian knife, but with psychic power. You see the Western world entered Mexico with Cortez and stopped simple physical sacrifice. The priests made the most of their necessity and evolved psychic murder — *the control of matter at a distance through the human will.* We Westerns are just beginning to touch the fringe of that science by, say, controlling the fall of dice at Duke University." I could feel Poggioli was laughing inwardly at me, at himself, at Americans in general, at our grotesque and lopsided materialistic development. He turned to me again, suddenly. "It follows so perfectly the contrary patterns of life in the Orient and the Occident," he said.

"What does?" I asked.

"The use to which they put their extremest achievement in science. We developed the atomic bomb amid peaceful labor and used it to destroy cities. They developed the transformation of the energy in the human soul amid scenes of bloodshed and agony and used it to build up the peaceful soil. One is as horrible as the other, but there is more intelligence in theirs."

"Poggioli," I cried, "you don't really believe that, do you?"

"Certainly not. I'm an American the same as you. I don't believe there is any power guiding anything; all is accident. It was an accident that the crowd expected the peon's death. It was an accident that he died. It was an accident that our new friend waited outside Swilly Bill's night club with a note. It was an accident that we found him . . ."

"Then what did the eighty-first

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kilometer stone have to do with all this?" I demanded.

"The kilometer stone," Poggioli replied, "was one of two things. It was either the finial of a still-operating Aztec temple . . ." here I interrupted in amazement to ask why he suggested such an idea. He said, "To conceal an Aztec temple under a public highway would be a highly Indian ruse." The only reason he toyed with this idea, he explained, was because he knew there was an Aztec temple in Tacuba and he did not know where else to look for it. Also it would explain why our taxi driver absolutely refused to drive us to that particular road marker.

His alternate hypothesis was that the kilometer stone marked the limit of clairaudience for priests in the Aztec temple, wherever it was. That explained why the chess player would say nothing to us in Swilly Bill's Club, but invited us outside the limit of audibility before conversing with us.

We walked the rest of the way to our hotel in silence.

Well, I realized then that I had thrown away my time investigating such an alien situation. I knew I would never be able to work it into a good standard mystery. Still I couldn't get it off my mind. I lay awake nearly all night long thinking about it. Finally, just before I went to sleep, I decided there was one thing more I could do: make Belita tell me whether the cockfighter and the chess player were one and the same man or different men. I was sure she knew.

So next morning at the breakfast table I questioned her. No, no, she knew nothing whatever about the matter. She seemed rather frightened at the idea of knowing something. Deliberately I laid a hundred-peso note on the table.

"Belita," I said, "are you sure you know nothing about the chess player and the cockfighter?"

The girl wet her lips; her face turned a sickly yellow. "*Señor*," she whispered, "I . . . I can't tell you . . . anything . . . here."

"Then where?" I asked with rising interest.

"*Señor* . . ." she looked at the money but seemed about to faint, "if . . . if you will drive me beyond the . . . the eighty-first kilometer stone . . ."

"Sure, sure," I agreed, "have Pancho bring around his car. I'll drive it myself, just you and me and my friend here . . ."

"*Si, Si, Señores* . . ." Her hand shook so the coffee spilled.

We stopped eating breakfast, went out, and all three of us got into Pancho's car and started for the kilometer stone. We didn't tell Pancho where we were going; we probably wouldn't have got his jalopy. Belita began talking as soon as we left the hotel. Her story was very simple. The cockfighter and the chess player were brothers. Their father had been the *alcalde* of Tacuba and he wanted one of his sons to continue as the leading man of the city. He sent one son to Oxford, England, for an education.

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The other son he kept in Tacuba in order to give him a native education. If the people of Tacuba desired a man of Western education, one of his sons could fill the position; if they desired a man of native education, the other son would be chosen. So these two sons became political rivals and, in the end, deadly enemies.

I interrupted: "Belita, just where and from whom did this other son get his native education?"

"*Señor*," whispered Belita, "here in Tacuba is an . . . an old . . ." She was staring ahead at the kilometer stone which we now approached. Suddenly she broke into a violent scream. A buzzard, one of those Mexican buzzards which form the street-cleaning department of every Mexican city, was sailing through the air quite low. Revoltingly enough we struck it. Its noisome bulk crashed through our windshield. I, too, was shocked, but mainly for the girl. She was so tense and apprehensive already, in such a taut condition, that I knew this accident would wreck her nerves.

I cried to Poggioli to do something. He was already bending over her. He snapped back, "Get to the hospital quick! A piece of glass has cut her throat!"

As I slewed the car around, I remembered some of Poggioli's words: "*Psychic murder* — the control of matter at a distance through the human will . . ."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Edmund Crispin is the pseudonym of Robert Bruce Montgomery. His first detective novel was published in England under the title,* THE MYSTERY OF THE GILDED FLY; *it appeared in the United States as* OBSEQUIES AT OXFORD. *This was followed by* HOLY DISORDERS, *and last year by* THE MOVING TOYSHOP. *His books are erudite, witty, and extremely readable. The author was born in 1921, in England, of Scotch-Irish parentage. He studied modern languages at Oxford and has a degree from St. John's College. He traveled extensively in Europe before the war, has been a church organist, pianist, and conductor since he was fourteen, and admits to a fascinating list of recreations, to wit: beer-drinking, Elizabethan literature, Chicago jazz (whatever that is), and swimming. His favorite detective-story writer is John Dickson Carr, and his favorite American authors are H. L. Mencken and James Thurber. In his first letter to your Editor Mr. Crispin mentioned the fact that he was a schoolmaster for three years; in his second letter, written only two months after the first, he referred to his being a schoolmaster for two years. This is a curious chronological discrepancy: what happened to his third year of teaching? Into what strange limbo did a year of Mr. Crispin's life vanish? It couldn't have been the time in which he wrote his first detective novel — that, according to his publisher, took only fourteen days . . . James Sandoe, of connoisseur fame, adds two further irrelevancies to pique your interest: Crispin is the patron saint of shoemakers, and the name turns up in* HENRY V *because the battle of Agincourt was fought on St. Crispin's Day . . . Which leaves us with only one more introductory comment: "Deadlock" is Edmund Crispin's first short story — another distinguished EQMM "first" which you will find a sort of Tom Sawyerish adventure-in-detection, English-style . . .*

DEADLOCK

by EDMUND CRISPIN

CAPTAIN VANDERLOOR had never understood the English licensing laws, and on the evening in question he came rattling at the bar door of the *Land of Promise* at a quarter past six, quite unaware that since his previous visit we had changed to the summer hours. He got his drink, however (as always, it was gin and bitters), because my father sent me to see who it was, and of course I took the captain round to the back door and my father served him in the kitchen. That often happened — at any rate, with people my father approved of. Strictly speaking, it was against the law, but the Hartford police hardly ever visited us at the Basin, and the local folk, and

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one or two of the yachtsmen, had been used to drinking in the kitchen for so long now that we had all more or less forgotten there was anything wrong about it.

The *Vrijheit* — Captain Vanderloor's ship — had berthed that afternoon. Her monthly visits from Harlingen always provided an agreeable break in the routine of our tiny community. She was a gray, square-built, smallish craft, Diesel-driven, and she carried her cargo of eels alive in the hold (from the Basin they were shipped inland through the canal, and so eventually reached London). She would come up the Estuary on the tide, and then would follow the ticklish business of getting her into the lock, which was only just large enough. Like all the other craft, she moored on the west bank of the canal. She was manned by a mate, an engineer, and three hands, all of whom regularly took the bus into Colchester the evening after berthing, and there got drunk. And equally regularly, Captain Vanderloor stayed at the Basin and visited the *Land of Promise*.

He was a small, stocky man, with a close-cropped bullet-head and an apparently permanent expression of gentle melancholy on his face, and he spoke English well, though in a decidedly guttural way. As a seaman he had rather come down in the world. He had been master of a large merchant vessel, the *Liverpool Gem*, which went down, it was said, through his negligence, off the coast of Java. Plainly there was some doubt about what actually occurred, for he never lost his master's ticket. But in any case the Company brought him back to Europe, and he was relegated to the comparatively humiliating position he now held. Very occasionally he spoke of the old days, but he never welcomed questions, and I think he was anxious to forget as much as he could. Certainly he seemed a good seaman — though in those days I knew little about the handling of larger craft, and know even less now.

A kind of ritual had grown up which always followed his arrival. My father would hand him the gin and bitters and say: "Good crossing?" And he, even if it was blowing a gale, would say: "Very fair," and offer my father one of the thin black cigars he habitually smoked. This my father invariably refused.

There was no variation in the procedure on the Saturday evening I have in mind — except, perhaps, for the presence in the kitchen of our new maid, Anne, who was peeling the potatoes for supper. She was a plump, cheerful girl, with red face and hands, and she was already inclined to take a far too critical interest in my goings-on. But, as my father remarked, she was a good worker — and all things considered, it was just as well, for my mother had died when I was very young, my father had his work cut out looking after the bar and the Yacht Club gear, and Aunt Jessica was of no more practical use than Papo, the parrot, who sat squawking

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and whistling all day in the parlor. Aunt Jessica padded about in a pair of ancient carpet slippers — I don't remember ever seeing her without them — and was subject to mysterious "attacks," the significance of which I didn't understand until later. Anyway, she was no help in our domestic economy, and to all intents and purposes Anne ran the house.

The fact is, I never liked or trusted Aunt Jessica. For one thing, her appearance vaguely disgusted me (she was about sixty, with a good deal of straggling gray hair, thin, and with an extraordinarily long and pointed nose). And for another thing, the way she talked seemed to me unreal and ridiculous. She was my father's sister, and my grandparents hadn't been well-to-do people at all, but to listen to Aunt Jessica one would imagine them the flower of the Edwardian *haut monde*. Moreover, Aunt Jessica seemed quite unaware that the world had progressed — or, at any rate, changed — a certain amount since those days. In her insistence on out-of-date conventions she was somewhat of a museum-piece. No lady, in her opinion, would do so-and-so; no well-bred child would say such-and-such. Please don't misunderstand me; our own age isn't such a model of courtesy and decorum that we can afford to laugh at the manners of other times. But Aunt Jessica's maxims were purely unintelligent and mechanical — and in addition, she had, as I now realize, views about sex which were positively diseased.

I seem to be a long time in arriving at the events of that night. But before I do, two more things remain to be explained: the relation between Murchison and Helen Porteous; and the topography of the Basin, which you will have to understand if you are to follow with any degree of ease and comfort what happened.

Murchison was a member of the Hartford Yacht Club. The clubhouse itself is about a mile farther down the Estuary, but a good many of the members keep their boats in the canal, the moorings by the clubhouse being very limited in number. Murchison had two craft — a fine thirty-foot power-launch and a sixty-foot Bermudian ketch. I may add that the use to which he put this last did not endear him to genuine yachtsmen. He would get a party on board, switch on the motor, pass through the lock, run a couple of miles down the Estuary, anchor, produce a case of gin, and after an hour or so return the same way. To the best of my knowledge he never went farther, and to the best of my knowledge he never set a sail.

He was well-to-do, unmarried, between thirty and forty, tall and powerful, with a black mustache, an aggressively loud voice, and a total lack of consideration for anyone not of his own financial standing. At the time of which I am speaking his chief interest in the Basin was his attempt to seduce Helen Porteous — an attempt in which, for all I know, he may have succeeded.

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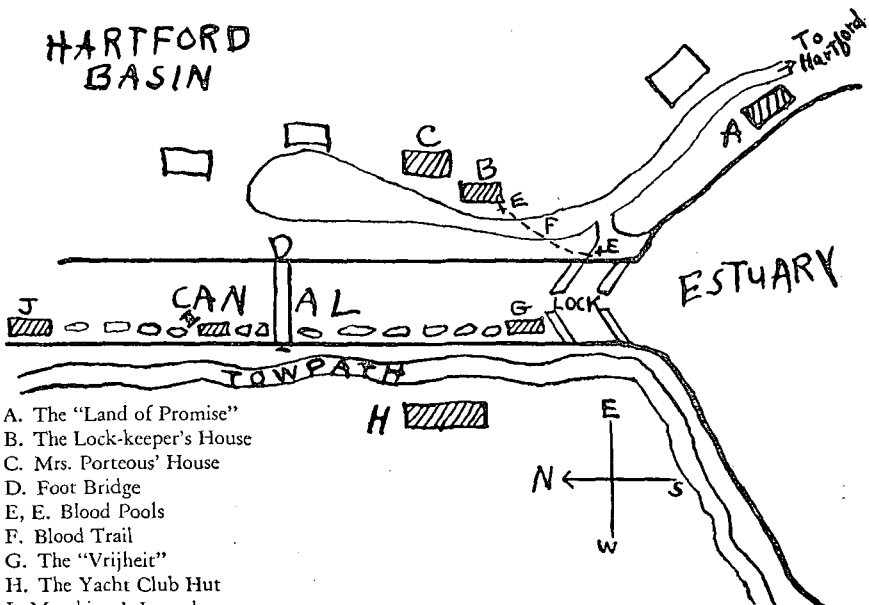
Naturally at the age of fourteen I didn't think of the matter in just those terms. It was a "love-affair" such as one saw on the films. But I well remember the night when Margaret Porteous and I crept along the canal bank and looked in at the porthole of the cabin in which Murchison and Helen Porteous were sitting. The tiny curtains hadn't been properly closed, and we could see something of what was going on. It wasn't very scandalous, I suppose; but at the same time it wasn't quite the sort of thing two young children should be allowed to witness. Margaret whispered to me, in her queer, husky voice:

"I think that's horrid."

I said, as casually as I could: "It's quite normal, you know." But I must admit that fundamentally I agreed with Margaret.

Margaret and Helen were both daughters of Mrs. Porteous, who lived next to Charley Cooke, the lock-keeper. Margaret was thirteen, and Helen eighteen. Their father had died some years before. Helen was thin but pretty, and fair-haired; she dressed well and appeared to me to use too much make-up. (At the time, I was inclined to be puritanical about such things.) Shortly after my father opened the bar that evening I saw her get off the bus from Hartford, where she worked. She generally stayed in Hartford for the evening unless there was some good reason for her to be



A. The "Land of Promise"
B. The Lock-keeper's House
C. Mrs. Porteous' House
D. Foot Bridge
E, E. Blood Pools
F. Blood Trail
G. The "Vrijheit"
H. The Yacht Club Hut
I. Murchison's Launch
J. The Morris House-boat

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back at the Basin, and I wasn't surprised when later on Murchison came into the *Land of Promise* with a couple of friends and announced that he proposed to spend the night on his boat. My father disliked Murchison (though being employed by the Yacht Club he couldn't afford to show it). So did I. So did Aunt Jessica. So did Captain Vanderloor. So, in fact, did everybody — which no doubt accounts for what happened to him.

You will have gathered that the lock is more or less the central feature of the Basin. The canal joins the Estuary at right angles, and the lock has to be a specially deep one, since even at high tide the river water is still six to eight feet below the level of the canal, while at low tide (when, of course, the lock can't be used) there is nothing but a stretch of sand and mud over which the gulls wander, scavenging. Along the west bank of the canal stretches a line of boats — boats of all ages, kinds, and sizes, one or two falling to pieces through sheer neglect, others painted and polished and cared for like the idols of some pagan tribe. Their mooring-ropes create a series of death-traps along the towpath. There is nothing beyond this towpath except some fields, in which the grass is kept brown and scanty by the salt winds, and the wooden hut in which the Yacht Club gear is kept. On the *other* side of the canal (which, by the way, can be crossed by the inner or outer lock gates or by a foot bridge farther up) are the houses, with the *Land of Promise* standing a little apart on the road which comes in from Hartford. This road ends in a kind of graveled car park in front of Mrs. Porteous's house and the house of Charley Cooke, the lock-keeper. Finally, I ought perhaps to say that although the Basin can be warm enough in summer, at other times of the year it's often bitterly cold, for it catches the east wind which blows up the Estuary. Just such an east wind was blowing on the afternoon three years ago when I . . .

But you will hear of that in its proper place.

As usual, I was sent to bed at half-past nine. I climbed the stairs to my room with a feeling of pleasant anticipation, for I had arranged to meet Margaret Porteous unlawfully at midnight, when we proposed to do a little innocent detective work. This involved climbing out of my bedroom window, and also — what from experience I knew to be a far more difficult job — keeping awake until the appointed time.

We intended to investigate the Maoris — two women and two men — who lived amid indescribable squalor in a broken-down house-boat some way up the canal. Their bickerings and beatings were a perpetually interesting topic of conversation to the local people, as was also the problem of their livelihood, for they would disappear for months at a time and then return to resume their existence in the house-boat as though they had never been away.

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Probably the police knew all about them, but they were a complete mystery to us. I had some notion, I think, that they worshipped their native gods, with fearful rites, in the watches of the night, and it seemed to be important that Margaret and I should witness these proceedings.

At half-past ten I heard my father lock the door of the bar and retire, with one or two favorites, into the kitchen (it was another part of the Vanderloor ritual that he and my father should play a game of chess some time during his visit). Shortly after eleven, the mate, engineer, and crew of the *Vrijheit* emerged somewhat noisily from the taxi which had brought them back from Colchester, crossed the lock gates, singing a sentimental Netherlands ditty, and boarded their ship. After that I must have dozed, for the next thing I remember is hearing the Hartford church clock strike midnight.

I splashed some water from the jug onto my eyes, and then opened the window and climbed out. This brought me to a sloping roof of gray tiles, and from there I could slip down easily enough to the penthouse roof, which overlooked the kitchen garden and was tarred — with the deliberate intention, I always suspected, of making my foothold on it precarious. Here I was held up for a short while as old Charley Cooke, the lock-keeper, chose just this moment to depart for home. I wasn't worried, however. Charley was a sober enough man during the week, but every Saturday night he was in the habit of drinking as much beer as he could carry, and generally a bit more on top of that. So *he* wasn't likely to notice anything.

When he had gone, I jumped down from the penthouse roof. I didn't like doing this, as it was a six-foot drop, and you got rather a jar when you landed.

Margaret was waiting in the garden.

"I was afraid you weren't coming," she whispered.

"Don't talk here, idiot," I whispered back.

We made our way towards the lock. A fresh, cold wind was blowing, and the night sky was full of clouds, so that the weak moonlight came and went spasmodically. It was clear enough when we reached the lock, however, for us to be able to see that no one was about, though we could hear Charley Cooke singing as he approached his house. We crossed by the inner gates of the lock, and walked along the towpath, feeling our way carefully among the mooring-ropes. Then, by the Yacht Club hut, Margaret stopped.

"I'm frightened," she whispered.

I was surprised. Margaret was a nervous child, but nervous in the way which welcomes rather than avoids an adventure. She was quite unlike me in that respect: I was unimaginative in the normal way, but prone to deep and sudden panics.

"What are you frightened of?" I asked.

"Suppose they don't like being watched?"

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This consideration had also occurred to me, but at the moment I was not prepared to admit it.

"They won't know we're there," I said.

"They will if one of us coughs or sneezes or anything . . . You go and look, Daniel, and then come back and tell me if there's anything interesting."

I was annoyed. The Maoris' pagan sacrifices seemed considerably less fascinating now than they had in prospect. But male honor could hardly admit defeat — at any rate, in front of a girl.

"All right, I'll go," I said shortly. "You stay here. Shan't be long."

"Be careful." She was shivering a little, but that may have been only the wind.

It had taken us, I suppose, three minutes to get to the Yacht Club hut. In another five I had reached the Maoris' house-boat, passing Murchison's launch on the way. The cabin was lit up and I could hear voices, but I didn't delay. As it turned out, my precautions in investigating the house-boat were needless. It proved to be completely deserted. Either its occupants had not yet returned, or they had chosen this day to decamp.

I admit that I was relieved, but at the same time it made our truancy rather pointless. The Hartford clock struck a quarter past midnight as I left the house-boat. I had only gone a yard or two when I met Margaret, who had come to meet me.

"Mummy keeps opening the door," Margaret said. "Do you think she knows I'm not in bed?"

"I expect she's waiting for Helen," I said. "Helen's out tonight, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"There's no one in the house-boat," I explained. "We'd better go home, I suppose."

"I *can't* go home now Mummy's on the watch . . . *Oh, Daniel* . . ." She sounded so miserable, and she was shivering so much, that I put my arm round her shoulders — and the next moment, embarrassed, hastily withdrew it.

"You can get in round the back," I said encouragingly. "You'd better not go over the foot bridge, though, or you might be seen. Come on. We'll go the way we came."

We returned along the towpath as far as the Yacht Club hut. We had no sooner arrived there than, across the canal, Mrs. Porteous's door opened, and I could see framed in the oblong of light Mrs. Porteous herself, Anne, and my father. Almost at the same moment, someone left Murchison's launch and crossed the canal by the foot bridge.

"They *do* know we've gone, then," I whispered. "Come on — I'm going to try and get back before Dad does."

We continued on our way, and crossed the lock, this time by the outer gates. Here I unchivalrously left Margaret to her fate. But I had only just got inside the garden when Anne and my father caught up with me.

"So *there* you are," he said.

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I was expecting to be punished, but he seemed unusually preoccupied, and simply ordered me to get off to bed, and stay there. He himself remained for some time downstairs, talking to Anne in the kitchen. And I just heard him say, as I closed the door behind me: "Curious about that blood . . ."

I would have liked to stay and listen, but I didn't dare. I went upstairs and undressed, congratulating myself on my escape, feeling slightly ashamed of having deserted Margaret, and yawning as though I'd not slept for years. Then, when I came to take off my shoes, I found stains on them — dark red patches, sticky in places, but for the most part almost dry.

I assumed at once that this was blood, and although such romantic guesses are not often correct, this one was. I wondered whether this was what my father had been referring to, and then rejected the idea, for he would certainly have asked about it. I wondered, as I crawled into bed, whether I should go down and tell him. I was still wondering when I fell asleep.

As it was holiday-time, I was allowed to stay in bed until half-past eight if I wanted to, but the following morning was so gloriously fine that I got up at half-past seven. As soon as I looked out of my window I could see that something unusual was afoot. A little knot of men were looking at something at the edge of the lock — among them were Charley Cooke and my father. And when one of them moved aside I was able to make out what had drawn their attention — a dark, broad, irregular stain. You may imagine that I got downstairs and outside as soon as I could, and the general preoccupation was so intense that I was able to go quite close without being noticed. My father had sent for a long pole; now he was pushing and dredging with it in the water of the lock. And in a little time a face, white and curiously peaceful, rose towards the surface and sank again. The drowned do not float until five or more days after they are dead, and Murchison had been in the water only seven or eight hours.

After the body had been taken away, it was not at all easy to keep me out of the proceedings which followed. For one thing, I could hardly be confined to my room; for another, I was by way of being a witness, since I had been out and about somewhere around the time when the murder occurred. That it *was* murder, there seemed little doubt. And, as I realized at the time, the police were going to have no difficulty in ferreting out motives for it. There were motives everywhere; at one time or another, Murchison had succeeded in falling foul of a number of people at the Basin.

When breakfast was over, I managed to slip out and inspect the bloodstains. From the pool (I call it a pool, though by now, of course, it was dry) at the edge of the lock, a trail of blood led almost to Charley Cooke's doorway. And here there was a second

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pool. I inspected these things with interest, but wasn't able to deduce much from them. Subsequently I went along to Mrs. Porteous's house and discovered Margaret in the garden. She had been soundly slapped on her return the previous night, and moreover had suffered from nightmares; so she was decidedly subdued. I made some attempt to enlist her cooperation in making a search round the lock — for what, I wasn't clear — but she had been forbidden to go out. I saw nothing of Helen; as it was a Sunday, she was pretty certain to be still in bed.

I wandered back to the canal-side. Hardly anyone was about; a sort of expectant hush hung over the Basin. Captain Vanderloor was on the deck of the *Vrijheit*, but doing absolutely nothing; in the usual way, unloading would have started by now. I suppose he anticipated that it would be interrupted in any case by the arrival of the police, and was not sorry for an excuse to delay putting to sea again. A colony of jackdaws were quarreling in the tall pine tree near the *Land of Promise*.

The sun shone brightly. I felt oddly purposeless and impatient.

Then I saw the weapon. It was a long, black, wooden stave, carved in loops and whorls at the top, and it was floating in the canal almost within arm's length of the bank. I called to Captain Vanderloor, and he seemed, for a moment, startled.

"What is it?" he shouted back in his heavy, guttural voice.

"Look!" I called. "Come look!"

I heard him descend the creaky wooden gangway of the *Vrijheit*, and then, unable to wait until he arrived, I got down on my stomach and began fishing for the stave; after considerable effort I managed to pull it ashore, just as Captain Vanderloor came up to me.

He inspected it carefully.

"H'm," he said. "There are still traces of the blood on it."

"It means the Maoris must have killed him," I pointed out.

The Captain took out his cigar case; he did not reply for a moment. Then: "Yes," he said slowly. "It must mean that. Shall I keep this stick to give to the officials?" He must have glimpsed the disappointment in my face, for he added gravely: "I shall be careful to emphasize that it was you who found it."

Little mollified by this promise, I was preparing to argue the point when the police arrived from Hartford, in a rather dilapidated-looking car. There was an Inspector and a sergeant and a constable, together with a doctor whom I didn't know. The Inspector was not impressive, and I was sadly disillusioned. He wore no uniform, and he was a weedy, undersized young man, with a marked Cockney accent, and fingers stained a deep brown by incessant smoking. His name was Watt, and he seemed to be totally lacking in any kind of method. On that Sunday morning he wandered about the Basin, talking to anyone he happened to come across, staring with

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vague interest at the scenery, and strolling in and out of people's houses more, it seemed, in accordance with some passing whim than for any definite purpose. I was at the age when I expected a detective to be hawk-eyed and ruthless, and I felt cheated.

The doctor and one of the constables hurried straight into Charley Cooke's house to which Murchison's body had been taken. The Inspector strolled towards Captain Vanderloor and myself.

"Morning," he said. "Is that the weapon that did it?"

That was the first experience I had of his particular idiosyncrasy, which was to ask all and sundry for their personal theories about the crime. Most of what he heard must have been absolutely worthless, but I realize now that he did it partly in order to form a judgment about the person to whom he was speaking, and partly for the sake of the scraps of information which sometimes slipped out. He had, too, a disconcerting habit of silence, which sometimes forced one, from sheer embarrassment, to say more than one had intended.

"Polynesian," he said now, as he swung the stave between his fingers. "Ebony. Pretty heavy. Funny thing to have about."

"It belongs to the Maoris," I explained eagerly. "They live in a house-boat up the canal. Or rather they did. They weren't there last night."

"And you think they're the criminals?"

"I — I suppose so," I stammered. "That is, it looks like it, doesn't it?"

He seemed to lose interest in the subject. He stared about him. "Trim little ship," he said, nodding at the gray, unromantic bulk of the *Vrijheit* across the canal.

"I am her Captain," said Vanderloor.

"Eels," the Inspector commented. "Never liked 'em, I'm afraid." I realized now that he knew or noticed a good deal. "And what about you, Captain?" he went on. "Is your money on the Maoris?"

Captain Vanderloor shrugged. "I know so little about it," he murmured. I noticed that he was standing stiffly, and that his manner was defensive.

"Lot of blood," said the Inspector mildly. "He might have been knocked on the head outside that house there and then pulled to the lock and rolled in . . ." He spoke slowly, as though inwardly preoccupied with some other matter. "Did you hear anything during the night, Captain?"

"I could not have," said Captain Vanderloor, "not in my cabin. I was on deck ten minutes or so before I go to bed, but I hear no sound then."

"What time would that have been?"

"Let me see: I return from the *Land of Promise* about twenty to midnight. Then I talk to my mate and engineer till about five past. Then I go out for some air."

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"You didn't step ashore at all?"

"No. I did not leave my ship."

"Can your people confirm that?"

"I think so. Several of them were awake." [1]

"Uh-huh." The Inspector flicked with the Maori stave at a blade of grass growing by the roadside. "I wonder what's the latest time it could have happened?" He turned to me. "So you paid a visit to the Maoris and found 'em not at home?"

"Y-yes."

"And when would that have been?"

"About ten or a quarter past midnight. I wasn't supposed to be out, of course."

The Inspector grinned. "Let's hear about it just the same. You may be a star witness."

So I gave him a detailed account of the expedition — though unfortunately it was cut short, just as I was about to tell him of the blood on my shoes, by the doctor's coming out of Charley Cooke's house.

"Well, doc," said the Inspector. "What's the verdict?"

"Cause of death, drowning," said the doctor shortly. He was a plump, gray-haired, self-important old man. "The skull wasn't fractured, though the back of his head was pretty well battered."

"Could this have done it?" The Inspector held out the Maori stave.

"That's the kind of thing. I'll analyze the stains on it if you like and tell you if they belong to his blood-group."

"Do that," said the Inspector, handing over the weapon. "Anything definite about the time of death?"

"Only within four hours or so."

"That's no good." The Inspector lit a fresh cigarette from the end of the one he was holding. "All right, doc. You'd better take a sample of this blood on the ground, too, though I shouldn't think there's much doubt it's his." He spoke to the constable, who was hovering in the background. "Anything in the pockets?"

"Only a comb and a handkerchief, sir."

"No watch? No money?"

"He was sure to have been carrying money," I put in. "He was rich, you know."

"Uh-huh." The Inspector nodded. "Robbery with violence, eh? We must send out an S. O. S. for those Maoris. Who can give me a good description of them?"

"My father can," I said.

"Fine. We'll go and see him. You," he said to the sergeant, "find out where this house-boat is and give it the once-over." And to the constable: "You drive the doc into Hartford and bring the car back again."

"I'll send in an ambulance to take the body away," said the doctor.

"Fine," said the Inspector. "It'll do where it is for the moment. Now let's go and see your father."

Captain Vanderloor went back to the *Vrijheit*, and the Inspector walked with me to the *Land of Promise*. We

[1] I had better say at once that Captain Vanderloor definitely did not leave the *Vrijheit* after he returned to her from the *Land of Promise*.

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found my father limping about the bar, tidying it. He was a tall, weather-beaten man of fifty, with short red hair, and he had been a seaman until an accident with a winch had made him lame.

"Hello," he said to me. "I didn't know you'd been out."

I introduced the Inspector.

"Pleased to meet you," said my father. "We may as well sit here. Will you have a drink?"

"It's a bit early," the Inspector grinned, "but I think I could manage a pint. Nice little place you've got here."

He gazed about him while my father drew the beer. There was only one bar in the *Land of Promise*, and I've seen nothing like it elsewhere. It served, really, as the family sitting-room, and Aunt Jessica, Anne, and I all sat there during the evenings. Consequently there were quantities of personal belongings — books, sewing, and whatnot — scattered about it, and they contributed to a much more friendly, informal atmosphere than is usual in such places.

"We like it," said my father non-committally. He gave the Inspector a description of the Maoris, and the Inspector phoned it through to Hartford. While he was doing this Aunt Jessica shuffled in, wearing her carpet slippers and a curious, shapeless garment of gray and purple wool. She was insatiably curious and hated to miss anything, whether it concerned her or not. She settled down in a leather chair, sitting bolt upright, and began knitting.

The Inspector had finished with the telephone. "Well, Mr. Foss," he said, "have you got any ideas about all this?"

My father, who had not stopped his tidying, shook his head. "That'd be your job, wouldn't it?" he said doggedly. And since the Inspector made no answer, resuming his abstracted inventory of the room: "I'm not sorry he's dead," my father added. "I didn't like him."

Aunt Jessica looked up from her knitting. "We should speak no ill of the departed, George," she remarked.

I thought that my father was going to spit, but he restrained himself.

The Inspector drank his beer. "Any special reason for not liking the chap?" he asked.

My father nodded. "You might as well know," he said. "You'd hear about it sooner or later. He said he intended to get me kicked out of my job here — looking after the Yacht Club gear. He could have done it, too."

"And that would have been a nuisance?"

My father grunted. "'T'isn't easy to make ends meet."

The Inspector turned to Aunt Jessica. "And were you fond of Mr. Murchison?" he enquired.

The click of my aunt's knitting needles ceased abruptly. "He was impure. They say nowadays that the woman's as much to blame as the man, but I know it isn't so. *He was impure*," she repeated with sudden vehemence.

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The Inspector accepted this comment with perfect equanimity. "Were both of you up and about round midnight last night?" he asked.

My father answered him clumsily, like one repeating a lesson inadequately learned. "I played chess with Vanderloor until about twenty to twelve. Charley Cooke left here at midnight. About a quarter past I found this kid had done a bunk, and Anne came along with me to Mrs. Porteous's house to see if Margaret had gone out with him. Jessica was there — weren't you, Jessie?"

"Since half-past eleven," my aunt supplied. "I often go along for a little gossip before bed." Her ball of wool rolled onto the floor, and the Inspector picked it up for her.

She smiled graciously at him by way of thanks.

"Well, Margaret wasn't in bed, either," my father continued rather uneasily. "I knew they must be somewhere along the canal, so I decided to go after them."

"I saw you come out of Mrs. Porteous's house," I said audaciously, "about twenty past twelve."

"Oh, you did, did you?" There was a grimly humorous look in my father's eye. "Anyway, the moment Anne and me left Mrs. Porteous, we were held up by finding Charley Cooke clinging to his own door-post. We'd seen him, as a matter of fact, lying there in a drunken stupor when we first went into the house, and I'd made a note to get him indoors as soon as I had a moment —"

"Uh-huh," the Inspector interrupted. "You didn't think it was very urgent, then?"

"No. That sort of thing's happened before. Anyway, he was on his feet again by the time we had reached him."

"Just a minute. I take it that Charley Cooke's house and Mrs. Porteous's are next door to one another?"

"That's right."

"Are you sure the man you saw lying there when you went into Mrs. Porteous's house *was* Charley Cooke?"

My father hesitated. "I suppose I'm not, really, now I come to think of it. It was just a black huddle in the shadow of the house. But it never occurred to me it was anyone else."

"How long were you in Mrs. Porteous's house?"

"Four or five minutes, I'd say."

I was interested. For the first time the Inspector seemed to be asking definite questions with a definite purpose.

"And whereabouts," he went on, "was this person lying?"

"Just outside Charley Cooke's door."

"Where that pool of blood is?"

"Yes. Somewhere there."

"And after you'd pushed Charley Cooke indoors —" The Inspector stopped, looking at the oddly elusive expression which had appeared on my father's face. "Well?" he said.

"Well what?"

"Did you by any chance notice

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that Charley Cooke had blood on his clothes?"

"Yes," said my father slowly. "Yes, he had blood on his clothes."

"And after you left him?"

"Anne and I were just setting out to look for the kids, when we met Helen Porteous. She'd come across the foot bridge from Murchison's launch."

The click of my aunt's knitting needles ceased again.

"Uh-huh. And you talked to her?"

"Only for a moment. We left her with her mother."

"Then?"

"Then Anne heard these kids scuttling along the towpath on the other side, so we went back to the *Land of Promise*."

"Did you pass the lock?"

"No. We went the back way, through Mrs. Porteous's garden. It's a bit quicker."

"Ah." The Inspector sighed deeply, as though exhausted by so many questions. "And you, Miss Foss?"

"When my brother came to Mrs. Porteous's house," said Aunt Jessica primly, "I saw that it was after a quarter past midnight — a very late hour for me — so I returned here."

"With your brother?"

"No. I was ahead of him."

The Inspector lit a fresh cigarette as the black marble clock on the mantelpiece struck a quarter to ten. And then came the moment I had been dreading all morning. Every week my father sent me off on my bicycle to ten o'clock Sunday School in the Baptist Church at Hartford. At the best of times this was a misery. This particular Sunday, with the police at the Basin, I felt that it would be a monstrous imposition to be made to go, and I had been desperately hoping that in the general excitement my father would forget about it until it was too late. Unfortunately he heard the clock.

"Well, Daniel, time for you to cut along," he said.

"Oh, but Dad . . ." I began.

"There's no 'but' about it, my lad. Off you go."

Protests were useless. I went, and I don't think I've ever passed a longer hour. I remember that we were given the story of Nebuchadnezzar, but even the exploits of my namesake failed to arouse the smallest spark of interest in me, and when asked for my view of the incident of the fiery furnace I expressed the opinion, very sulkily, that it was all a trick with chemicals. Needless to say, this theory wasn't well received.

However, even Sunday School must come to an end some time, and shortly after eleven I was back again at the Basin. Luckily I had not missed a great deal. It is true that the Inspector, by some means known only to himself, had succeeded in the interval in acquiring a good deal of general information about us all; true also that his interview with Charley Cooke had resulted in what the newspapers call "dramatic revelations." But as regards these last, Mar-

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garet Porteous had been enterprising enough to eavesdrop, and when I returned she told me what she had heard.

What it amounted to, in brief, was that on getting back from the *Land of Promise* Charley Cooke had found Murchison lying unconscious almost on his doorstep, had been seized with the fear that he would be implicated in the crime, and had dragged the body to the edge of the lock and left it there.

Unfortunately he was quite vague about the details of the affair — times and so forth. For instance, he was dimly aware that at some stage or other he had "passed out," and again, he thought that he *might* have entered his house before moving the body, but could not swear to it.

"But what *I* don't see," said Margaret, "is why he moved the body but didn't try to hide all the blood."

The only explanation I could suggest was that he had been drunk — as to which there was no doubt whatever. Admittedly the story wasn't very plausible (I was half-inclined to think that Charley had not only dragged Murchison to the lock but pushed him into it as well) but at the same time it struck me that Charley's account corresponded pretty closely with what any drunken, timorous, not very intelligent old man might have done in the circumstances. He would consider the area round the lock a sort of no-man's-land; and in the darkness even a sober person might have missed the blood.

I was asking Margaret for more details about the interview when Mrs. Porteous called her indoors to talk to the Inspector. I'm sorry to say that the temptation to do some eavesdropping myself proved too strong for me. I knew that the Inspector would be in the sitting-room at the back, and I knew also that at the expense of a few wall-flowers I could listen beneath the window.

Scarcely more than a minute after Margaret had left I was settled at my station.

I risked a look into the room. It was shabby and comfortable, with the big black stove along one side, and the kettle simmering on it, and Pip, the canary, sitting rather dejectedly in his cage. There were hunting prints on the walls, and the glass and crockery gleamed on the dresser. The Inspector was sitting with his elbow on the oilcloth which covered the table. A cup of tea was in front of him. Mrs. Porteous was in a wicker armchair which creaked every time she moved. Helen, with her scarlet lips and large eyes, was propped up against the dresser, evidently sulking. And Margaret, thin, nervous, and slightly elfin, with her fair hair in a tangle over her eyes, was repeating the story of our night's expedition.

"Uh-huh," said the Inspector when she had finished. "And while you were waiting by the Yacht Club hut, you didn't hear anyone moving about on the other side of the canal?"

"No. Except for Mummy opening the door."

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"Fine. And now perhaps the other young lady will tell me what she did last night."

There was a moment's pause before Helen replied. "I was on John's launch," she said at last. "John Murchison, that is. I was there from after supper till a quarter past midnight."

She stopped. In accordance with his habit the Inspector said nothing. Finally Helen went on:

"John was there, of course, and two friends of his. Then — then some time around midnight, I can't remember exactly when, we ran out of gin, and John said he'd go to the *Land of Promise* and try and get some more. I — we waited a bit, and he seemed a long time about it, and at a quarter past I thought I'd better go home. I'd said I'd be in early, you see," Helen added spitefully, and I could visualize the look which she gave her mother.

"Yes," said the Inspector thoughtfully. "And as I understand it, you met Mr. Foss on your way back?"

"That's right. He asked if I'd seen the kids anywhere. I hadn't, so I came on home."

The Inspector's voice was placid. "You were up at the time, Mrs. Porteous?"

"Yes, Mr. Watt." Mrs. Porteous was plump, homely, and slow-moving, and her speech mirrored her perfectly. "I was a bit worried, you know . . ."

"Oh, *mother* . . ." Helen began impatiently.

"Yes, dear, I know . . . Not of course that there was anything *wrong* in Helen's being out, Mr. Watt. But when it got to midnight, and I heard Charley come home singing from the *Land of Promise*, I thought I'd just have a look outside the door to see if there was any sign of my girl. It was then I saw that Charley had fallen down outside his door."

The Inspector spoke sharply. "You're sure it was Charley?"

"Of course it was. Who else would it have been?"

"But could you definitely *see* that it was?"

"No," Mrs. Porteous admitted. "But all the same I'm quite sure —"

The Inspector interrupted her — impatiently, I thought. "What time was this?"

"A minute or two after midnight."

"Uh-huh. And you just left him lying there?"

"I knew the night air would soon bring him round, Mr. Watt. And indeed it did. When I next looked out, he was gone."

"What time did you next look out?"

"It was close on ten past. Naturally I kept glancing at the clock, since I was anxious about Helen."

"And at that time there was no one lying outside Charley's house at all?"

"No, no one."

"After that Mr. Foss and Anne turned up?"

"Yes. A little after the quarter. I found Margaret wasn't in her bed,

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and Mr. Foss set out to search for her and Daniel. It was then that Jessica left. A minute later Helen arrived, and a minute after that, Margaret."

I don't think that anything further was said which had a bearing on the case. The Inspector thanked Mrs. Porteous for the tea and took his departure, and after a discreet interval I took mine. I didn't see him again until nearly an hour later. Eventually I found him standing near the lock and staring out across the Estuary, his hands pushed into the pockets of his untidy brown raincoat. It was low tide, and the horizon was unusually clear — a sign, I knew, of rainy weather in the offing. The wind was freshening, and clouds were beginning to obscure the sun.

I went up to him.

"Well, well," he said when he saw me. "With your talent for eavesdropping — *and* Miss Margaret's — you must know nearly as much about the case as I do."

I blushed.

"And what's your opinion of it all?" he asked.

"I suppose really it depends on the two bodies," I said, fearful of being thought a fool.

"It depends on the two bodies," he assented gravely. "Which was Murchison? The one lying outside Charley Cooke's door from 12:02 to 12:10? Or the one lying there from 12:16 to 12:20?" He paused. "Well?"

"I don't know," I said.

"There's no doubt it was the second one," he told me.

"Why?" I demanded.

"For the good and simple reason that if it was the first, Charley must have dragged it to the edge of the lock some time between 12:05 and 12:10. And in that case either Margaret or Captain Vanderloor would have heard. You can't perform *that* sort of operation in complete silence."

"I see," I said slowly. "Then Mr. Murchison's was the second body and Charley took it to the lock between 12:16 and 12:20, when Anne and my father were in with Mrs. Porteous. And he'd just come back from doing that when Dad found him leaning against the door."

"You've got it."

"But in that case when did the Maoris attack Mr. Murchison?"

"Pretty certainly between 12:10 and 12:15."

"But Margaret and Captain Vanderloor would have heard *that*."

"I don't think so. Some of these natives have got the art of making a silent attack pretty perfect. The only thing that troubles me is whether Margaret and Vanderloor could have *seen* anything that was going on on the other side of the canal."

"No," I said definitely. "It was much too dark."

"There you are, then. Charley Cooke comes home from the *Land of Promise* just after twelve. He tumbles down on his own doorstep. Some time before ten past he recovers and goes inside, so that when Mrs. Porteous looks out, she sees no one there. Then along comes Murchison, heading for

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the *Land of Promise*. He left the launch *about* twelve — neither Helen nor the other two people could tell me anything more definite than that. The Maoris, who've had their eye on his bankroll and have been lying in wait, follow him, strike him down, rob him, drop the weapon quietly into the canal, and do a bunk. Enter your father, who mistakes the body for Charley Cooke. While your father's in with Mrs. Porteous, Charley comes out of his house, sees Murchison, and drags him to the lock."

I considered this. "Yes," I said, "I suppose so . . ."

"Vanderloor had gone below," he explained, "Margaret had run up the canal to meet you, and the others were indoors. So no one would have heard."

"No one would have heard," I pointed out, "if Charley had pushed him into the lock there and then."

"Ah, but look at the pool of blood," he said. "Murchison must have lain there at least five minutes."

"Oh, yes, of course." I was annoyed with myself for forgetting this.

"So that's the set-up, it seems to me. Charley left him there, and someone pushed him in . . ." The Inspector paused, and there was an uncertain look in his eye. "I don't think I should be telling you all this . . ."

He looked back over the Estuary. Down at the bend a sailing dinghy was visible, skimming across the shallow water. The gulls were quarreling fiercely over a small fish stranded on the mud, now that it was low tide.

"You can't mean it was my father," I said boldly, "because he was with Anne from a quarter past twelve onwards."

I reflected, and realized what he was thinking. "Aunt Jessica?" I said in a small voice.

For a long time he was silent. Then:

"I've been looking into possible motives, you see," he said almost absently, "and she is the only person having a motive and lacking an alibi. She went back alone to the *Land of Promise* . . . You don't like her, do you?"

"No," I answered slowly, "but all the same . . ."

"She's a bit cracked, you know." He tapped his forehead meaningly. "I don't think it'll get as far as a trial. They'll put her in a home and she'll be quite well looked after."

I said: "She hated Mr. Murchison because of Helen."

"Uh-huh. And there he lay, unconscious and right on the edge of the lock. It wouldn't have needed much strength to shove him in . . . Well . . ."

He turned away, to gaze again at the Estuary. The wind was still rising, and the sailing dinghy had passed out of sight.

"Pretty view," he said. "I'd like to paint that some time."

"Paint it?"

"I turn out a daub now and again." The Inspector sighed, and I noticed that for the first time that morning he was without a cigarette.

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"Well, I'll have to be getting back to Hartford."

We returned to the *Land of Promise* in silence, each of us occupied with his own thoughts. My father was working in the kitchen garden, and the Inspector went to speak to him. I watched them for a moment. My father was leaning on his spade; he said nothing, and his expression hardly changed. Then I went slowly into the house.

Anne was not in the kitchen, but Aunt Jessica was. She sat swaying back and forth in the rocking chair, and she was talking slowly and quietly to herself. The gray woollen dress had a damp stain down the front, and a broken tea cup lay at her feet. Tiny drops of sweat stood out on the smooth yellow skin of her face, and her eyes were as blank as the windows of an empty room. What she was saying had no coherence or meaning at all. At first she didn't notice me, but when eventually she became aware of my presence she made as if to leave the rocking chair and come towards me. I ran from the room in terror. She was still talking, in that gentle insane monotone when they took her away.

The Maoris were never found. Since Murchison's watch was discovered in a pawnbroker's shop in Liverpool, it was thought that they had taken ship and left the country. Certainly they never reappeared at the Basin. As the Inspector prophesied, Aunt Jessica did not come to trial. The death of Murchison had permanently turned her brain, and she was sent to a Home Office institution, where my father visited her regularly every month. She never spoke of what had happened, but the police were in no doubt about her guilt. My own apprehension subsided little by little, as I realized that she would not recover her reason. I suppose I ought to excuse myself for saying that, since after all Aunt Jessica was innocent of the murder. But I could not bear the thought that an interlude of sanity might reopen the case and direct the attention of the police to the person whom I knew to be guilty.

Nine years have passed since the events of which I have spoken. In that time much has happened. When Hitler invaded Poland, Captain Vanderloor was given the command of a large merchant vessel. He visited us, staying at the *Land of Promise* for a night, just after he had had the news, and we celebrated his return to bigger things. A month later he went down with his ship, torpedoed in mid-Atlantic. Helen Porteous became the mistress of a second-rate engineer (and a petty swindler into the bargain), and I believe had a child by him. There was much less yachting at the Basin. The eel-boats were replaced by small, fast vessels which brought engineering supplies from Sweden. There were sporadic bombing attacks.

And in one of these Margaret Porteous was killed.

I had been called up, and was far away in Yorkshire when it happened. My father wrote to me about it, and

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for minutes after reading his letter I sat in the crowded, noisy mess as though stunned. Margaret and I had drifted apart as we grew older; a shyness lay between us, intensified in my case by a sense of my obvious inferiority, for she, at seventeen, was a slender, almost ethereal girl, while I, a year older, was as clumsy and loutish as young men generally are at that age. My only comfort now — and it's so petty a consideration, in the circumstances, that I'm almost ashamed of mentioning it — is that she must have been aware of what I knew, and yet trusted me implicitly. To what happened during that night neither of us ever referred. And perhaps it was that, as much as anything else, which fixed such a gulf between us in the years that followed.

I had always thanked God that the doctor had interrupted us before I was able to tell the Inspector about the blood on my shoes. Now I'm not so sure. If they had put her in a reformatory Margaret would be alive now. Alive . . . I ought really to say, existing. Perhaps things are better as they are. I don't know.

Once I had begun to think about it, it was all obvious enough. The bloodstains on my shoes could not have been picked up on the way back to the *Land of Promise*, for Margaret and I returned by the *outer* gates of the lock, and there was no blood on the ground as far along as that. So I had stepped in it when we first crossed the canal, by the *inner* gates of the lock. That, you will remember, was just after midnight. By that time, then, Murchison had already been attacked. But Charley Cooke had only just set off for home, and so could not have had time to drag the body to the side of the lock. It seemed, then, that it must have been beside the lock that Murchison was originally attacked by the Maoris. He was not lying there, however, when Margaret and I crossed the canal, for it was light enough for us to see that no one was about, and consequently, as the blood trail showed, he must have been already by Charley Cooke's doorstep, where either he dragged himself in search of assistance or he had been dragged by the Maoris. So his was the *first* of the two bodies that were seen lying there — the one that was gone when Mrs. Porteous looked out at ten past twelve. Charley Cooke had taken it back to the lock, the second blood-trail being superimposed on the first. Afterwards he returned, fell in a stupor, and was seen by my father.

There was only one difficulty about this theory: Charley Cooke could not have dragged Murchison to the lock in complete silence, and yet both Captain Vanderloor, on the deck of the *Vrijheit*, and Margaret, awaiting me beside the Yacht Club hut, swore that they had heard nothing at all. I knew, as soon as I had got this far, that they must be lying. Yet Captain Vanderloor had not committed the murder, for it was established that he had not left his ship. If he was lying it could only be because he knew that

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Margaret had pushed Murchison into the lock, and wished to shield her. And she, of course, was lying to save herself. After the thing was done, it was an easy matter for her to return along the towpath and meet me by the Maori house-boat.

Why did she do it? Certainly, I think, because of her sister Helen. The night we saw Murchison making love to Helen — her mother's grief at the relationship — Aunt Jessica's sex-obsessed prejudices — these things, to a sensitive child of thirteen, would probably be more than enough to inspire the easy act which resulted in Murchison's death. She must have heard Charley dragging him to the lock, gone to investigate, and found him lying there, seen the easy way, and taken it . . . I sometimes wonder if, as she grew up and discovered that what had so disgusted and horrified her was after all the merest commonplace, a sense of guilt deepened in her. Yet I am inclined to think, after all, that it was not so. Children and adults have very different values about some things — death, in particular. If you have read A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA, you will remember the indifference of the other children to the death of John. I believe that Margaret felt just such an indifference — amounting in the end almost to forgetfulness — about Murchison, and that it remained with her until she was killed.

A week before the raid I was home on forty-eight hours' leave, and it was then that I saw Margaret for the last time. I was helping my father carry a sail from the Yacht Club hut to the *Land of Promise*, and she was standing at the very edge of the Estuary, gazing across it as the Inspector had done six years previously. The tide was full, and an east wind that whipped the gray water into millions of little wavelets was tangling her fair hair and moulding the old mackintosh which she wore against the lines of her body. She did not look round, and I, poor fool, hesitated to speak to her because of some trivial squabble we had had on my previous visit. She lies in Hartford churchyard. Now and again I put flowers on the grave . . .

ABOUT THE STORY: *The boy detective in books of short stories is indeed a rara avis of crime fiction. Your Editor's bibliographic files show only seven books of shorts in which the protagonist-sleuth is a boy. Five of the seven were written by Lord Frederic Hamilton. This series — the only series of its kind in the entire history of the detective story — was published in England between 1915 and 1923, and they constitute the saga of P. J., otherwise Master P. J. Davenant, sometimes called The Secret Service Boy. Young P. J. is described in this fashion: "Apart from his phenomenal detective flair, he is a perfectly normal, cheery, healthy, cheeky, fifteen-year-old English boy, with an extraordinary quick-working brain. The only*

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unusual things about him are his desperate fits of sleepiness and his craving for tobacco. The bouts of sleepiness are probably what keep him normal, otherwise the sharp blade might wear out the scabbard, and he would be an odious, jumpy, nervy little prig. It's the over-active brain, too, that makes him crave for tobacco."

If you study that description closely, you will probably agree that Lord Hamilton, in creating his boy detective, did what so many other writers did before and after him — patterned his character on The Great English Master; P. J. is essentially a juvenile Sherlock Holmes, in reverse-English.

The first P. J. volume was titled THE HOLIDAY ADVENTURES OF MR. P. J. DAVENANT. *The book must have been popular for in the same year, 1915, a second volume appeared called* SOME FURTHER ADVENTURES OF MR. P. J. DAVENANT. *At that time the boy detective was certainly a novelty, and the English reading public clamored for more. In 1916 Lord Hamilton produced* THE EDUCATION OF MR. P. J. DAVENANT, *and in 1917, anxious obviously to keep his teen-age 'tec perennially young, dug deep into his character's past and revealed* THE BEGINNINGS OF MR. P. J. DAVENANT. *The final two volumes recorded P. J.'s marvelous exploits as a stripling of the secret service during the first World War.*

It is only fair to add that Lord Hamilton did not write the P. J. stories for personal profit: all the author's earnings on the books were handed over to the Marchioness of Lansdowne's "Officers' Families Fund" — so that P. J. did his bit in more ways than one.

By one of those curious coincidences that happen only in real life, the first book of short stories about an American boy detective appeared in the same year that the English cub criminologist was born. In 1915 Harvey J. O'Higgins's THE ADVENTURES OF DETECTIVE BARNEY *was published. Mr. O'Higgins created a boy bloodhound as the result of writing a series of articles on the Burns detective agency: he saw the wonderful possibilities of depicting simple, realistic private-eye work through the eyes of a typical American boy, and he succeeded so admirably that Barney Cook has been called "the only believable boy detective" in fiction. Later, in collaboration with Harriet Ford, one of the Detective Barney tales was dramatized, becoming a Broadway hit under the title* THE DUMMY. *It was this play, you may recall, which introduced the actor Ernest Truex to New York audiences.*

The only other book of shorts about a manhunting minor is strictly humorous: in 1928 George Ade published a series of parodies "intended to recall memories of the Nickel Library days." The book was titled BANG! BANG! *and its chief character, Eddie Parks, the Newsboy Detective, romps through hair-raising adventures that burlesque not only the lush Dime*

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Novel era but also that other typically American purple-patch, the ruggedly individualistic Horatio Alger opera.

All of which is a roundabout method of commenting on the story you have just read. "Deadlock," as you now know, is that rare tale of boy-sleuthing in which a youngster outsmarts an oldster. True, schoolboy Daniel Foss was in possession of a vital clue unknown to Inspector Watt; but the Inspector had every opportunity to find the clue for himself — indeed, only the unfortunate interruption of the police doctor prevented the boy detective from divulging his precious clue to his older and more experienced adversary. The reader, however, was given all the facts necessary for a correct solution: you were acquainted with the topography, with the time elements, and with the circumstances under which young Daniel got blood on his shoes. If you did not deduce who really killed Murchison, you too were outwitted by a mere lad of fourteen.

If you are willing to take the time to re-read "Deadlock," you will discover that it is an infinitely finer story than you first thought — no matter how much you may have liked it on first reading. Only through a second reading (after you know the truth) will you appreciate to the fullest degree how scrupulously fair Mr. Crispin has played, how credible a detective his fourteen-year-old boy really is, and how far the author has advanced in solving the problem of creating a wholly satisfying child detective . . .

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Jack Finney is one of the three new writers discovered by EQMM's Second Annual Contest. With two others — Harry Kemelman and Mrs. R. E. Kendall — Jack Finney was awarded a Special Prize for a first-published story. Mr. Finney is thirty-five years old, married, has no children, and lives in Manhattan. At present he is a copywriter in the advertising agency of Dancer-Fitzgerald-Sample — he has been writing advertising copy for the past twelve years. The EQMM Annual Contest spurred him to writing fiction, almost the only writing he has done outside of his work since he finished college in 1934. Submitting a story to the Ellery Queen contest, and winning a prize, has revived Mr. Finney's interest in creative writing and now he is tilting his typewriter at the windmill of radio. His first attempt at radio ratiocination is, in his own words, "quite a bloody script — two killings in less than fifteen minutes" (which is certainly par for the course). Mr. Finney closed his letter to your Editor by saying: "I once saw Ellery Queen (one of them) in person. He was, as I recall, denouncing the movies." Could be, could be!*

THE WIDOW'S WALK

by JACK FINNEY

I'm so mad I could spit.

I walked into her room that morning as always; quietly, though not on tiptoe. The loose board creaked, but she didn't move, of course: she sleeps like a pig. At the side of her bed I stood looking down. She lay flat on her back, her skin, even her eyelids, yellow and wrinkled, her skull showing behind the sagging old flesh, and her mouth, without her teeth, puckered to a slit. How I hate it when I have to kiss her. It takes a day for the feeling to leave my lips.

Her pillow was on the floor. It always is, though I've often spoken about it. I wore gloves and my suede jacket and skirt. I picked up her pillow and held it tightly at each end, stretched between my hands. I edged closer to her bed, almost touching it. The rest I went through only in imagination, for I was rehearsing: I had to be certain, first, that I could really do it. But I saw it in my mind as though it were happening. I could even feel tentative little muscle movements.

Down with the pillow, flat across her face, a knee on the bed, shoulders hunched over my arms, the knuckles of each fist pressed deep in the mattress. A moment of utter silence, then her bony hands shoot out, clawing rapidly, senselessly, at my arms and hands, scratching at the leather. Then they tug purposefully at my wrists. A silent, almost motionless struggle . . . and now her old hands begin to relax.

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Suddenly a new picture flashed through my mind, and up to that moment this possibility had never occurred to me. Suddenly, and I could hear it in my brain, her feet began to drum on the mattress. Fast! Fast as a two-year-old's in a tantrum, and loud.

I couldn't stand that. Not even in imagination. I could feel the blood drop from my face. Perhaps I made a sound, I don't know. And I don't like to think how my face must have looked. But when I turned it to hers — I'd been staring straight ahead — those mean, blue eyes were boring into mine.

"What are you doing?" she said, in her flat, cold voice. The panic remained for a moment. Then I could speak.

"Nothing, Mother," and my voice was easy. "I decided to shop early." That explained my jacket and gloves. "And I thought I'd tidy up your room first."

"Can't do much tidying while I'm still here."

"No, I guess not. It was foolish of me. I'm sorry I disturbed you. Try to sleep some more."

"Can't sleep once I've been waked up; you know that." She was trying to prolong the conversation, alert for a clue.

"I'm sorry, Mother. I'll be back in a few minutes and get you some breakfast." Then I went out to the stores, though there was really no shopping to do. I bought a few staples.

It's infuriating, though. So perfect, so simple — and I just can't do it. She wouldn't be smothered, you see. Her creaky old heart would give out! Her doctor has warned us, and he'd be the doctor I'd call. Then I'd phone Al: "I tiptoed into her room to see if she wanted breakfast, and she looked sort of funny, and — oh, Al, she's dead!"

Almost true, and it would have been true, really, by the time they arrived. I'd have run it over and over in my mind, like a film, till I believed it myself, almost. I know how to lie. But I'm just not a murderer, that's all. I'm simply a housewife.

I'm thirty-two years old, five feet five inches tall, wavy hair, dark-blue eyes, reasonably pretty, and I'm in love with my husband. I'm a homemaker, much as I dislike that word, and I want my home the way it was before she came.

We didn't do much, then, Al and I. Evenings mostly at home, reading in the living room. In the spring and summer, the garden till dark. Bridge with the Dykes fairly often: we hardly see them now. And occasionally a movie. Daytimes I cleaned, I shopped, I cooked. That's all. But I liked it. I made a home — for my husband and me. And I want it back.

But now it's like this. The other morning I was doing the dishes. She sat on the back porch, "taking the air" — unpleasant phrase. I couldn't see her, actually, but I could see her in my mind, staring out at the pile of new lumber in the yard, hands folded in her lap. And thinking of me. As I was thinking of her. For a long time

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she made no sound, and then she cleared her throat. That doesn't mean anything to you, does it? But it did to me. And she knew it. It was a nasty, deliberate, spiteful reminder that she was present and existing, sharing my house and my husband. Do you see now, what I mean? I can feel her, actually *feel* her in every room of the house at all times, day and night! Even in our bedroom which she never enters.

Oh, I'm going to kill her, all right. Al will get over it. He *must* hate it as much as I do. We've had four years of it. And it started as soon as she came.

We'd had a date with the Crowleys, made just before she arrived — a weekend at their cottage on the lake. And we kept it: she insisted. "You children go ahead. I'll be glad to get rid of you!"

"Sure, now, Mother?" Al asked. "You know, a weekend's not important, and if —"

"Of course I am! Now, I won't hear another word — you're going!"

The doctor was there when we returned Sunday evening. An ambulance in front of the house, a nurse inside with an oxygen tent. A heart attack. I know she did it deliberately; not faked, exactly, but somehow self-induced. She'd phoned a neighbor in the late afternoon, hardly able to talk. Our neighbor hurried over, called the hospital — and that's what we came home to. She's never had another attack, and we've never had another weekend.

I mentioned it again a few days ago. "Yes, I'd have got over it," Al said. "You can't foresee and guard against everything. But you have to try. I have to see that she has as long and happy a life as she can." And then he startled me by adding this, "But I know it's hard on you sometimes, Annie."

I'd thought he didn't realize, wasn't aware. Of course he must have been, a little, at least. But he'll never know how I really feel, that I'm sure of.

My new plan is so perfect, you see. It's going to be a push, a sudden push from a high place. So simple, but it took me a long time to think of it. I was afraid I couldn't trust myself to go through with any of the plans I was able to think of. And then it came to me. There's nothing, really, to go through with in a push! It's over before you can think, over the moment it's started! And then . . . well, I heard her gasp, turned around, and there she was, disappearing over the edge! Her heart, I suppose.

But what high place? She never leaves the house. The stairs, from our second floor to the first, turn at a landing; not much of a fall. It wouldn't be certain. I wish I could plan ahead and think more logically. Al says I'd be out of house and home in a month if he weren't here to plan for me. Maybe he's right, but I've always found, it seems to me, that things work themselves out in the long run.

And sure enough. One night Al and I were reading in the living room; his

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mother had gone to bed. One of my magazines had come that day. I was leafing through it and I came to an article on "Widow's Walks" — photographs of the originals in New England, sketches of modern adaptations. So cute. Perfect little porches, the article said, for sunbathing and for sitting of an evening. Perfect: a "Widow's Walk" with a knee-high railing.

Al's set in his ways, though, and I could just hear what he'd say if I suggested a "Widow's Walk" on *our* house!

I did, though. "Look, dear," I said, and he glanced up from his book. "Aren't these darling?" I held up my article.

"Uh, huh," he answered. I smiled expectantly and didn't move. "Yeah, they are," Al said. I continued to wait, still smiling, still holding my magazine up. I know the game: we've been married six years. He was hoping I'd consider his comment sufficient and let him get back to his book. Or that I'd be the one to get up. So I waited. Al is a polite man, and he started to rise. In an instant I was on my feet, carrying the magazine over to him. And because he'd kept his comfort, I'd earned my interruption. He laid his book in his lap and took my magazine.

"Aren't they darling?" I knelt on the floor beside Al's chair. " 'Widow's Walks,' they're called."

"Yeah, I've seen them," Al said. "The old whaling days. The women watched for the men at sea."

"So that's what they're for!"

"Sure. That's why the name. Half the time the husbands never came back."

"Well, no danger of your drowning at the office, dear. And I could watch for you to come home after work. How about building one on our roof?"

That half-irritated, half-pitying look men reserve for women's impracticality came over his face, but before he could turn to look at me, I was smiling. He grinned, then. "Oh, sure," he said, "I'll start tomorrow."

I waited three nights before I mentioned it again. We were walking home from the movies. And I waited till we were less than a block from home; just time enough to voice his objections, not time enough to get dead set against it. "I've been thinking, Al. It *would* be nice to have a 'Widow's Walk.' It'd be easy to build," and now I was excited and enthusiastic. "You're so handy with tools and the plans are all in the magazine. It'd be *so* nice in the evening. I'll bet we could see the river, and —"

"Oh, Annie," Al said, "in the first place —" And I listened, and nodded, and agreed.

"It was just an idea," I said: we had reached our porch and he took out his keys. "But you're right, it wouldn't be practical." And as we entered the house, I added only this, "Your mother would like it, though." Then we had to be quiet: she was asleep.

It took less than two days. Spring came to stay on a Thursday. The sun

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was warmer, closer, the ground moist and crumbling, and the air was alive. Al, I knew, would be aching to build something, anything. He's a marvel with tools and loves to work with them. The lumber was delivered on Friday, dumped in the back yard, and I signed the receipt.

I grinned when Al came home. "What's the wood for?" I asked, and Al grinned back. His mother had to be told, then, and I let Al tell her. She mumbled and muttered about the lumber on the flower beds. Is there anything she likes, anything that meets with her royal approval? But I didn't care, not this time.

Sunday, it happened again. That damned, unexpected panic! Maybe I relaxed too much — it was that kind of day. Everything green and alive, the outdoor sounds so new and clear and soft; the sort of day you think of when someone says, "Spring." It should have been perfect.

Al was working on the roof in the sun — no shirt. His mother and I on the lawn in canvas chairs, she with the Sunday paper, while I shelled peas. Dinner was a comfortable two hours off, the meat was on and needed no attention. You could feel the air, soft and cool, moving across the backs of your hands. And it carried sound as it never does otherwise. A dog barking, many houses away, the chitter of birds, and the soft, clean sound of the wood as Al worked on the little, half-finished platform he'd built on the roof. A pause, then the sudden loose clatter of light new planking as it dropped on the heavier timbers already in place. A grunt from Al as he got down on his knees, then the skilled tap, tap of his hammer nudging a board to position. The tiny rattle of nails, the sharp ping, ping as he set one in the wood, then the heavy, measured, satisfactory bang, bang, bang, on a rising scale, as he drove it home.

"He's going to fall," she said nastily.

"Oh, no, Mother, Frank's light as a cat on his feet." I spoke gently, kindly, and I smiled. She didn't answer directly, didn't look at me.

"Don't see the use of it, anyway. Porch on a roof!"

"But, Mother," I said, "you'll love that porch!" That was a mistake: her face set. Any urging from me is like pulling a mule with a rope. I said nothing more, but I was annoyed at myself and at her. *If you only knew*, I thought, and then, without warning, the panic broke. I hadn't expected, hadn't allowed for it, but suddenly the sound of that hammer, bang, bang, bang, was the sound of a hammer building a scaffold. The next plank scraped and bumped hollowly over the others, then dropped into place. And I couldn't bear to hear the next nail, to hear the sound of her scaffold moving nearer and nearer to completion. I rose, turned, set the bowl carefully on my chair, and ran to the house.

Al called to me, "What's the matter?" then he yelled. "Annie!"

"The meat!" I shrieked, and

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yanked the screen door open.

I leaned on the kitchen table, hands flat on the top, my eyes closed. "Take hold of yourself, take hold of yourself," I muttered senselessly, and then, in a moment or two, I was all right. The heavy, hollow, hammer sound began again and I listened. "Yes," I thought, "a scaffold. For her. Make it good and strong."

What a ridiculous weakness, though. Not to be able to count on yourself, to trust yourself! Oh, I *wish* she'd die of her own accord!

She won't though. She knows I want her to. Yes, she's that stubborn! Al finished the porch — it's really very cute — but she wouldn't use it. He painted it Sunday night, a light green, and we went up next morning before he went to work. His mother, too: trust her to be in on everything. But she wouldn't go back. I'd try to keep from urging her, but sometimes I couldn't help it. Then she'd smile, stay just where she was, and answer, "No, you go up, dear. I'm comfortable right where I am." Then I'd have to go up there and sit.

Things work themselves out, though. I stopped talking about the porch, and spent a lot of time there. It *was* rather nice, and presently she began to suspect that I liked getting away from her. And maybe she was a little lonely. Then, one evening at dinner, Al mentioned the porch. I told him how much I liked it, how quiet and so sort of away from things it seemed. Maybe it was my speaking of the pleasant quiet that gave her the idea. She thought it would be so nice to have a radio up there — the one from the kitchen, perhaps. She knows I use it whenever I'm cooking. I wanted her to start using the porch so much that I nearly agreed with her. But I caught myself.

"I don't know that a radio would be so good up there, Mother. It's —"

"Don't see why not!" she answered instinctively. "Like to hear a few programs myself, sometimes, and if we're going to sit up there all the time —"

I was elated, "We'll see," I said, coldly, and later when she'd gone to bed, I told Al, "Put the radio up there tonight — from the kitchen. I hardly ever use it."

"You're sweet," he said, and kissed me. He's a darling.

Now she likes the porch. Loves it! She puffs and mutters her way up to the attic, rests for a few moments on the old cedar chest, then pulls herself up the new flight of stairs to the roof. And there she sits, with her fan and her handkerchief, all morning long, till the sun gets at it from the west. Of course she has me on the jump all the time. Downstairs for the mail, for her glasses, for a drink of water, for anything and everything she can think of. "Do you mind, Annie? I'd go myself, but —"

Sometimes I'll say, "In a minute," and then let her wait. But usually I answer, "Of course not, Mother, I have to go down anyway." And I don't mind. Not in the least. Because it makes me madder and madder

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every time she does it. And that's what I want.

I know I can't trust myself, can't be sure I won't stop an instant before it happens, unable to go through with it — unless I see red. I really do see red. Some people think that's a figure of speech, but it isn't. When I get really furiously angry, it's as though a sheet of red cellophane were in front of my eyes. I actually see red, and then I can do anything.

I think it's going to happen soon, now — about the radio. Things work themselves out, you see. She had to use it, of course, once it was up there. And she's discovered a particularly unpleasant program. It comes on at ten; oldtime songs played on an organ, and an obnoxious-voiced man reading bad poetry. Ten, she knows, is when I've always listened to "Woman of Destiny." I asked her, the other day, if she'd mind my occasionally hearing it just to keep up with the story. She guessed not. But when I get up there, after breakfast dishes and the beds, there she sits listening to *her* program. Never a move, never a suggestion to change it to mine. I haven't said any more. I just sit there, seething. She knows it, too, and likes it.

One other thing has been happening, lately. I've forgotten, several times, to fold the canvas chairs when we leave the porch for the day. Then, next morning, the seats are damp from the dew and she has to sit on the rail till the chairs dry. She's complained about it.

Oh, things do work themselves out. One of these mornings the chairs will be damp again. I'll come up at ten and there she'll be, sitting on the rail listening to that sanctimonious fool on the radio. I'll sit down beside her. She'll complain in that nagging voice of hers that I forgot the chairs again yesterday. I'll suggest that she might think of it herself occasionally. Then that sullen silence. I'll glance at the radio, then back at her; hinting that she *might* just suggest hearing my program for a change. She'll ignore that, as always. My blood will start to boil. And I'll let it. I'll feed the flames, remembering everything she's ever done, and that's plenty. I'll start back through the years and remember them all. And suddenly — I'll see red. Really *red*, just for an instant. Then, afterwards . . . panic? Well, let it come! Who wouldn't be panicky when she'd seen her mother-in-law fall two and a half stories to a cement driveway? Things, you see, do work themselves out. And it'll serve her right. It will! It'll — serve — her — right! The old *bitch*.

I don't know, now, why I wrote what you've read. I started, I remember, with some idea of getting all my plans on paper. It became something else, of course, but I continued to write just the same. I meant to burn it, but I never have. I've kept it and read it, many times, over and over again.

Somehow I didn't think much about Al's using the porch. Naturally

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he did, on weekends especially. He went up one Saturday morning, shortly after his mother. I'd forgotten the chairs again, the night before, and she was sitting on the railing. I suppose, this time, her attack was a real one. Al sat on the opposite rail, the width of the porch away, and she couldn't have been sure he'd be able to reach her in time. He almost did, though. When she started to fall, he shot across that porch faster than I'd ever seen him move before. I was watching; I'd been coming up the stairs and my eyes were level with the floor of the porch.

He got a hand on her skirt, a tight strong hold, reaching way over the railing a split-second after she was clear of the porch. And then, as she plunged, her skirt went taut, yanked on his arm with the force of a whip, and the precarious balance he held, leaning way over the rail, was gone.

Things do work themselves out, I suppose. Long after their husbands were dead and gone, the old seafarers' wives must have continued pacing the floors of their "Widow's Walks." The name says that. Back and forth, back and forth they walked, day after day after hopeless day. As I do.

ABOUT THE STORY: *"The Widow's Walk" is a crime story. No, that's not quite true. Annie planned to murder her mother-in-law, but as you now know, the plan backfired — the intended crime never came off. Purists might quibble, therefore, as to the legitimacy of calling "The Widow's Walk" a crime story. They would more than quibble if we called it a detective story: there is no detective character, either professional or amateur, and there isn't even the breath of detection anywhere in the tale.*

Yes, we would be forced to admit that "The Widow's Walk" cannot properly be classified as a detective story.

Yet it contains, entirely apart from a premeditated crime, two of the most important elements in a detective story.

It contains (1) a clue, and (2) the purest of all detectival ingredients, fairness to the reader.

The clue is handed to you on a silver platter. It is placed before your eyes (and mind) in the most prominent position imaginable. It is literally thrust upon you.

The clue is the title of the story.

And the title of the story is an ingenious example of the modern fairplay method.

Had you stopped to analyze the full implication of the title, you would have been able to anticipate the climax; had you realized the full meaning

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of the title, you would have been able to foresee the unexpected ending. For consider, in the light of what you now know:

How could the story achieve its only possible technical perfection? Only if its main device — "the widow's walk" — turned out to be precisely and literally a "widow's walk." How was that possible? Well, suppose the mother-in-law was actually murdered, as the reader was led to believe: the death of the mother-in-law would not make the porch on the roof a real "widow's walk." Only one event would make the title come true — the death of the husband Al. That, and that alone, would make Annie a widow.

So, from the very beginning, from the moment you read the title of Mr. Finney's story, you should have known what would happen. But did you? We didn't. We missed the plot significance of the title completely . . .

"O"

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This story is, in the author's own words, the "second whack at the Farnsworth legend." The first whack was "The Testimony of Dr. Farnsworth," which appeared in the January 1945 issue of EQMM . . .

Three must be Dr. Golden's lucky number. Consciously or unconsciously he uses three major threads in the development of each Farnsworth tale. In the first story the design-for-deduction was the result of interweaving the threads of detection, medicine, and music. In the second story the pattern-for-perfidy is an equally sensitive blending of detection, medicine, and the theatre. Dr. Golden's knowledge of rare and curious lore is truly astonishing. If the strange erudition with which he adorns his stories is not always factual, or interpretatively factual — that is to say, if Dr. Golden commits any errors, medical, musical, or theatrical — your Editor confesses he is not sufficiently expert to be the flaw-finder.

In "The Challenge to Dr. Farnsworth" you will discover an inner trinity too — a trinity of death. Atropine. Scopalamine. Strychnine. A Tinker-to-Evans-to-Chance poison-play that is perhaps new to detective fiction. Scenting the possibility that some readers may find this toxic triple-play controversial, we quote the author again: "If the murderer's modus operandi *seems farfetched, if it smacks too much of reaching for some fantastic* deus ex machina, *please note for the record that the identical device was used in real life by a criminal whom I encountered in 1921." The defense (aprioristic and anticipatory) rests . . .*

THE CHALLENGE TO DR. FARNSWORTH

by FRANCIS LEO GOLDEN

THE casement windows were opened to the mild breezes from the Hudson River. It was an evening in early April. Mrs. Grady, the housekeeper, had set the table for eight.

"This is Captain Tim McDonald of our local Detective Bureau." Dr. Farnsworth was moving around the room with his introductions. "That angelic morsel over there is Deeny Corson, the first, second or third Lady of the Theatre, I forget which." Laughter raced after the jocularity.

"And here, Tim, are other members of the original Broadway company now on tour with 'The Shepherd's Call.' This rotund bundle of amiability is 'Beefy' Helland, the author of the play."

"Guilty, as charged, Your Honor," said Beefy solemnly. "Someone had to take up Shakespeare's staff."

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The old doctor's eyes twinkled. "Yes, and gazing upon your obesity, I would say it was Fal-staff."

"That should smother you for the evening, Beef," smiled the blond, broad-shouldered chap at the end of the table. Farnsworth moved McDonald to that spot. "Shake, Tim, with Lee Beckx. Not only is Lee the stage manager but he doubles as an Italian constable. That should endear him to you. And this tall, lithe fellow is Ellison Gardell, the production prodigy who '*Variety*' says could take any well-laid stage egg and serve it back to the public as a succulent omelette."

Dr. Farnsworth had now circled the room. "You all know Dr. Larry Wayne? My protégé in the business of Expert Witnessing. Let's see. That makes seven of us. Who's missing? Oh, yes, where is Paul?"

Miss Corson gave answer. "He'll be here, Doctor. Had one errand to make."

"Paul Calvert," Farnsworth explained, "is the co-star with Deeny. Nice people, Tim, even though they invaded the privacy of my trout stream last Fall with an outdoor rehearsal."

"Fortunate for us, Cap," injected Helland, the playwright. "This man Farnsworth is terrific. Imagine lecturing *us* on the drama? All in one breath he told us there are only two nations whose literature culminated in a really supreme dramatic movement."

"Greece and England," chimed in Gardell, the producer, as he opened his mouth to toss in some almonds.

"Right. He took the Hindu dramatists apart: dissected the seldomly-read epics of Sakuntula and Mahabarata; described Latin literature as derivative and the classical drama of France as too academic to be national."

"He didn't omit pre-Nazi Germany," remembered Beckx, the stage manager. "Too literary to be quite dramatic. And Spain had only Cervantes and Calderon." The stage manager nibbled on a hors d'oeuvre.

"And his dissertation on stage storms," added Deeny as she handed a paper napkin to Beckx, "was simply terrific."

"My domain," declared Beckx. "Yet he took me back to 1571 when John Izarde charged twenty-two shillings to counterfeit thunder and lightning in the play 'Narcisses' . . . how they used cannon balls to simulate thunder in Ben Jonson's day."

"The guy definitely belongs on Information Please," chipped in Gardell. "How many times did Shakespeare use thunder and lightning? He gives the answer in a jiffy. Both 'Macbeth' and 'The Tempest' opened with them. You meet 'loud weather' in 'Julius Caesar' and 'The Winter's Tale'; thunder in 'King Henry VI'; a storm at sea in 'Pericles,' and a hurricane in 'King Lear'."

"Maybe he's a frustrated actor," suggested Deeny impishly.

"Aren't we all?" asked Dr. Farnsworth philosophically.

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"I'd like to know all that's inside his head," said Captain McDonald. "I came up here tonight to check the testimony he will give in the Sanders Case and what do you suppose the issue rests on? Whether old Sanders had rheumatism or arthritis. And how can you tell the difference? By the blood sedimentation test. He'd make a great detective." McDonald shook his huge Celtic head for emphasis.

"How about it, Dr. Farnsworth," asked Gardell, "would you care to enter our Correspondence School of Crime Detection? A diploma after ten easy lessons?"

Farnsworth looked at Gardell. The banter seemed innocuous enough. He smilingly made answer. "Criminology is not my line. Unlike Apelles' cobbler I prefer to stick to my last. And now, Larry, would you help Midge with these cocktails while we're waiting for Paul?"

"And I'll tell a bit of a story that Dr. Farnsworth might enjoy," said Captain McDonald.

"Good," they chorused. Larry ranged the room with the tray.

"Yesterday," began the Captain, "my little Margaret Mary, age eight, was returning home from the grocer's with a bottle of milk when she stumbled. The milk splashed the suit of a man passing by. He must have been a decent sort. Told the youngster to dry her tears, he'd buy her another bottle and now Mama won't spank, will she?"

"This really happened?" asked the stout playwright, reaching for a drink.

"Yes. And the kid must have been impressed. You see, once a month my wife goes shopping and on that day, whether I like it or not, the little girl is parked with me down at Headquarters. The men all like her and she has the run of the place. Today she got into the Rogues' Gallery and removed one of the pictures. When my wife returned to Headquarters to take the child home, that was just an hour ago, the youngster showed the picture to her mother. 'This is the nice man, Mommy, who bought me the milk yesterday.' "

When the "what-do-you-knows" died down, Mrs. Grady ushered in a personable young man whose blackly-waved hair surmounted blue eyes. His puckish smile and juvenile air belied his twenty-seven years.

"Paul," cried Miss Corson. She embraced him warmly.

" 'Lo, Dr. Farnsworth." The young man's hand went out in a strong and pumping shake. "Swell of you to invite hungry actors to your festive board. I would have been here earlier but I had to stop at the cleaners. Yesterday this new blue suit was launched with a bottle of milk. A little girl sprayed me. But say, you should have seen the agony on that kid's face until I bought her a new bottle."

The silence had ominous portents. Miss Corson blushed through the Max Factor on her cheeks. Gardell whistled softly. The roly-poly playwright jotted down a note on the back of an envelope. Mrs. Grady ended the em-

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barrassment by announcing "Dinner is served."

They took seats and listened to the intonation of Grace by Dr. Farnsworth. Lifting his head, he looked toward Helland. "I haven't been able to see your play, Beef, while it was in New York. I've just the memory of those rehearsals through the trees. Your theme, as I recall it, is that poisoning is the economy of murder. That in the Borgia era, one poisoned a political or military leader which saved the State from going to war and killing the masses."

"Exactly."

"Why not see it tonight," suggested Paul. "Come along to the theatre with us."

"Not tonight, Paul. I'm testifying bright and early in Superior Court and I've got to refresh my mind on 'jackknife' fractures. But I could drop in at matinee tomorrow."

"Good," said the producer. "I'll leave your ticket at the box-office."

Dr. Farnsworth took the coffee cups from Mrs. Grady and passed them along the table. "If you please, Midge," he said, "bring me the cordial glasses. The ones that are individually numbered." The old doctor reached over to the miniature bar behind him and rounded up several oddly-shaped decanters. "Ah, thank you, Midge," he said, "a little Anise for Glass Number Four, some Benedictine for Glass Number Three, and as for you, Deeny, let me think. Up in Connecticut, it was Crême de Cacao? So that goes into Number Two." He beamed on them as a Boniface of old. "These numbers on the glasses indicate your progress in the theatre. This is Deeny's second starring vehicle; your third successful play, Beef; and your fourth production, Gardell. How is my memory?"

"Unbeatable," they said.

Dr. Farnsworth hoped so. His powers of observation had well-served him in the courtroom. Assóciation of ideas! That was it! If Einstein could prove there was relativity in the cosmic groups, he, Farnsworth, could prove it in everything. Take Beefy, the author, sitting here on his right. That slight cast in his eye is the only brake on a Superiority Attitude. H'm. Cast in the eye and cast in the play. Association of ideas! And Lee Beckx of the drooping left lip. Note the peculiar movement of the right tempero-mandibular joint while he chews. Probably once had his jaw broken. In an off-tackle play, judging by the gold football dangling from his watch-chain.

Farnsworth pushed his chair back and reached over the cabinet behind Paul. From a plush case he lifted a dazzling gem of a deep red color with a mixture of scarlet. More association of ideas! Gardell's neck was a map of Burma.

"I couldn't resist a survey of that cicatrical tissue on the back of your neck, Gardell," said Farnsworth professorially. "Carbuncles derive from the Latin. Carbo means coal. Carbunculus, a little coal. That was how the ancients named your carbuncle.

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A burning little coal in the head."

Gardell bristled: "What are you driving at?"

"Don't be sensitive," said Farnsworth soothingly. "I was conversationally leading up to an experience I had in the Province of Pegu. That's in Burma. I was called there to remove a carbuncle from the neck of the local Poobah. The radiation of that particular carbuncle had almost reached the base of the brain. My Oriental friend was grateful. He gave me this jewel."

"A carbuncle gem?"

"It's simply ravishing," exclaimed Denny. They all crowded around the jewel.

"This should interest you, Tim," continued Farnsworth as he looked toward Captain McDonald. "Criminologists, at one time, were undecided whether fingerprints or photographs of the retina — that's the inner lining of the eye that has a characteristic configuration — offered the better means of identification. There could be another method."

"What's that?" asked the Captain.

"If everybody in the world had a carbuncle on the neck. No two of them ever heal in the same pattern." Farnsworth replaced the jewel in the cabinet.

The guests rose to leave. "Tomorrow at matinee, Doctor?" Paul was drawing toward the door. "We'll turn in our best performance, eh, Denny?"

"That we will, Lover," she said.

It lacked a few minutes of curtain time when a short, stocky man ambled down the aisle and paused before Dr. Farnsworth's seat. He had a black bag, of the type physicians carry on sick calls, and wore a loose-fitting topcoat. He addressed Farnsworth.

"Are you sure, sir, that you have the right seat?"

Dr. Farnsworth looked up. "I think so."

The other held his seat stub to the light. "The box-office assured me my seat was exactly on the aisle. I prefer the end seat, you know."

Dr. Farnsworth looked again at his stub. "This is the seat the usher assigned me. But I'm the amiable sort. I don't mind moving in one seat."

"Thanks a lot," said the other. "Hope I'm not too much of a bother." They exchanged stubs and then settled in their seats. The instrumental music had ended. The house lights darkened. The curtain rose slowly on Act One of "The Shepherd's Call."

Superb setting, thought Farnsworth, and a nostalgia seized him as he saw a piazetta nestling in the shadow of the Church of St. Giorgio de Greci. It was, truly, the Venice that Farnsworth remembered. The scene showed the refectory. A frowsy-haired Latin servant busied herself with preparations for a collation.

Italy — Land of the Borgias. This Beefy Helland knew his Italy, mused Farnsworth. Their conversation last night had dwelt on Spello, Foligno, Spoleto, the miraculous 13th Century, the influence of Dante on Art. But enough of this abstraction. The

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play was on. Deeny, as Brigida, had come on stage. Paul was Felippo, and he was in a wordy duel with an older character in the play named Bartolommeo.

The stout chap next to Farnsworth looked at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. Not bored, Farnsworth hoped. This play had to have a successful tour. An extended engagement would swell the purses of those two nice youngsters, Deeny and Paul. Farnsworth chuckled softly. He was in on a little secret about those two lovable kids.

Stretching his long legs from east to west, Farnsworth unavoidably kicked the black bag on the floor. There was a faint tinkling inside. Mr. Stout Man was visibly annoyed as he reached to the floor and restored the bag to its former position.

Dr. Farnsworth was now uneasy. Some unexplainable trepidation poised over his head. He couldn't define this apprehensiveness. Does intuition shape events to come, he wondered, as he watched Felippo and Bartolommeo rush at each other on the stage? Macbeth might never have been Duncan's murderer, nor King of Scotland, had not "the weird sisters" suggested the crime by prophetic warning. Farnsworth gripped his seat as he watched Bartolommeo sway, then fall to the floor. Paul, flustered, amazed, looked helplessly toward the wings, then motioned to the stage hands. The curtain was lowered, the house lights went up, and the manager stepped to the proscenium.

"Is there a doctor in the house?" he asked.

The hubbub of the audience buzzed into crescendo. Ordinarily, Dr. Farnsworth was shy in the presence of such a call. He hated exhibitionism. If he could sneak quietly around to the stage door he would gladly render first aid.

Before Farnsworth could raise his voice, the stout man in the next seat arose with unprofessional alacrity. He stooped to the floor, gathered up the black bag, and started for the stage. Farnsworth marveled at the doctor's faith in humanity in not taking his topcoat along with him.

Twenty-five dull minutes elapsed before the curtain was raised. The manager announced "unforeseen circumstance . . . performance cancelled . . . refund at box-office."

The audience began a slow file to the lobby. Dr. Farnsworth looked toward the curtain. It might be gracious to go backstage and pay his respects to his friends. He trudged up the few steps and squeezed himself between the drop.

All around him was excitement and dismay. Deeny was weeping in Paul's arms. Fly-men tiptoed upstage. The electrician was dousing the orchestral lights. The manager and a policeman looked down on Bartolommeo.

The doctor from the audience had apparently finished his ministrations. He was removing rubber gloves and placing them in the little black bag. In the confusion, Dr. Farnsworth, from the opposite side of the stage,

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had but a fleeting glimpse of the prostrate actor. He had only Deeny's sobs to tell him that Bartolommeo was dead. Then the coroner arrived.

Dr. Farnsworth patted Deeny on the shoulder, mumbled his regrets to Paul, and retraced his path to the orchestra. The volunteer doctor's topcoat was still draped over the seat. "He might forget it," muttered Farnsworth. He gathered up the coat and started for the stage. The doctor had gone. Lee Beckx walked toward him. "What's this, Doctor? Making off with my coat? I wondered where I had left it."

Behind Beckx stood Helland and the house manager alternately consoling each other about the box-office and bellowing orders for Bartolommeo's understudy to get into action. Gardell joined them. "I rushed over from the office when I heard the news. The play definitely will go on tonight," he said.

Farnsworth waved farewell to them.

When he reached his ancient fortress atop Madison Avenue, he opened the door with his pass-key. It lacked several hours before dinner and he assumed Mrs. Grady would be at the market. Her presence at the phone surprised him.

Midge swung the bracket toward him. " 'Tis that sweet little girl that was here last night."

"Deeny? Why I left her only a half-hour ago. I thought you'd be at the market, Midge."

"Market, says he. And where will I find time what with Robert sick and last night's dishes still in the sink?" Midge flounced from the room.

"Yes, Deeny," he spoke into the phone. "What? Paul held by the police? For what reason?"

"The doctor who attended Bartolommeo told the Coroner that the blow from Paul's fist caused a heart attack."

"Is that all," replied Farnsworth cheerfully. "Just a technicality, my dear. Accidental injury isn't even a battery."

He could detect the rise and fall of her sobbing. "There's more to it than that," she cried. "I've known all along about Paul's police record. But he's not vicious, please believe me. It was only juvenile delinquency and bad company. And now, because Paul and Bartolommeo have been quarreling personally all during this tour, the police say there is a motive. The cast heard Paul threaten Bart in the dressing-room last night. The police say it's murder — malice and premeditation. Oh, it's all so horrible."

"Where are you now?"

"I'm still backstage."

"And Paul?"

"He's being booked at the police station."

Farnsworth looked at the clock on the mantlepiece. "Meet me there, darling, in ten minutes. And, please, no worrying. Your devoted husband will be all right."

He could hear the gasp over the phone. "How . . . how did you

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know? We've kept the secret even from the cast."

Farnsworth grinned. "More than that, my dear, you're fighting for the father of the youngster that's on its way."

Again her amazement came over the instrument. "Did you —"

"No, darling, I didn't uncover the secret from Paul. At dinner last night your appetite seemed stimulated, yet you were nauseated when I offered the Crême de Cacao. You told me your hair was growing luxuriantly, but your fingernails seemed brittle. You've been to the dentist twice this month. You described the five-mile walk Paul made to find a delicatessen that had smoked sturgeon which you craved. My sweet, it all adds up to an observing old busy-body. And now, promise, you'll stop worrying, won't you?"

"I'll try," she said. He waited a moment, then called Police Headquarters.

"Captain McDonald, please." He sketched little triangles on the desk pad while he waited. "That you, Tim? Farnsworth. What's the story on the theatre matter? What? Murder? Ridiculous. Who signed the certificate? The coroner? Let me talk to him. Or better yet, Tim, hold him there. I'm coming right over."

He spoke again into the phone. "Mercy Hospital? Is Dr. Wayne there? Yes, I'll wait, thank you." He held the receiver while he went back to his triangles. "It's ridiculous," he muttered again. "Yes, Larry? Drop everything and bring your car over."

He settled back into the easy chair for an ounce or two of meditation. His fingers ran up and down the long blue jowls that were always so smooth-shaven. He pecked at the closely-cropped, gray mustache as his mind reviewed the events of these past two hours. The kaleidoscope kept whirling and always returning to the doctor who sat next to him at the theatre.

Rubber gloves for a first-aid call? Rubber gloves were for surgery. Prevent sepsis. Invented by his old friend Halstead of Johns Hopkins who thought them up to protect the hands of a pretty nurse he later married. Handwashing in those days took the skin off your hands. Bichloride and carbonate of soda. How well he remembered! What the hell made that doctor put on rubber gloves?

He heard Larry's car pull up to the curb. He drew his coat over his shoulders as he started for the door. Larry noticed the tenseness in the old fellow's jaws. "Where to, Chief? You seem disturbed."

"Police Headquarters. Paul Calvert is charged with murder. It's preposterous. An actor named Robert Fortescue Runyan who plays the role of Bartolommeo collapsed on the stage. Died within the hour."

"It's hard to believe, Chief. Paul's a swell boy."

"Something odd about the whole matter, Larry. I was there, you know." The old fellow's eyes closed in further thought as they raced across town. "Larry," Farnsworth sat

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up, "would you use rubber gloves if you were only administering emergency treatment?"

"I don't think I'd have a pair with me, Chief."

"Exactly. And another thought, Larry. How can a doctor find time today to take in the theatre? Of course, I can. But I'm superannuated."

"Maybe relaxation, Chief. But at least he would tell the Physicians Exchange just where he was in the event his office had to reach him." Farnsworth patted Larry on the shoulder. "That's using the old bean, Larry. When we get to Headquarters, phone Mrs. Keller and check that angle. I'm very curious."

"O.K., here we are."

They swung through the door. "'Afternoon, Tim." Captain McDonald took his hat and coat. "This is Coroner Burgess, Doctor. A new man on the job."

Farnsworth gazed at the man. "Understand you signed the death certificate?"

"Yes, Dr. Farnsworth. There were contusions on the right side of the head. The doctor who attended him said it was a heart collapse from the force of the blow. There had been some bitterness between this chap Calvert and the dead actor. It dovetailed."

Farnsworth smacked his palms in a visible effort to maintain self-control. "Do you understand now, Tim, why I've been clamoring with the State Legislature to amend the law so that plumbers and bricklayers are not elected Coroners?"

"I resent that, Dr. Farnsworth," retorted Burgess.

"Oh, you do, eh? You didn't order an autopsy, did you? You didn't search for a coronary thrombosis, did you? You didn't remove the top of the skull for a subdural hemorrhage that would have revealed whether a blow caused death? You didn't do any of those things, yet you are willing to jeopardize a man's life! Ah, yes, there is something else. Who was the doctor who told you all this?"

The coroner stammered. "Why, uh, the doctor who came up from the orchestra."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know."

Farnsworth exploded again. "Are you listening to all this, Tim? It's down your alley. The coroner doesn't even know the name of the doctor. A little Latin might explain that. *Hic ab arte sua recessit.*"

"Meaning —?"

"Freely, Tim, I believe the gentleman stepped out of his profession. I don't believe he was a doctor. And will you please make a note of this, Tim. The topcoat that he came into the theatre with was claimed by Lee Beckx, the stage manager, whom you met at my home last night."

"How do you know all this, Doc?"

"Because, Tim, I sat next to Dr. Rubber Gloves in the theatre. And that reminds me of something else. Where's your phone?" Captain McDonald directed him to the desk.

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Farnsworth dialed his home. "Midge, my Irish sweet potato, haven't you washed those dishes in the sink yet?" He drew his ear away from the phone until the expletives died down. "I'm not berating you, old darlin', I'm just asking you to leave all the dishes and the glasses as they are."

"What's it all mean, Doc?"

"Actors never hit each other on the stage, Tim. Palms are slapped to simulate the sound of the blow. I was there when this happened. Yes, Larry, what is it?"

"I talked to Mrs. Kellar at the Exchange. Every physician is accounted for. No one attended the theatre this afternoon."

"Maybe he was an out-of-town doctor?" suggested Captain McDonald.

Farnsworth shook his head. "An out-of-town doctor wouldn't be carrying his black bag around with him. . . . And I have a strange feeling that I've seen this stout fellow before."

Larry laughed. "Did you look at the back of his neck for a carbuncle?"

Now Farnsworth chuckled. "I had a good look at the fellow's neck. There was no carbuncle. But he certainly needed a haircut. Tim, would you mind sending one of your fingerprint boys up to Midge. She'll show him the glasses."

McDonald spoke. "You're becoming one of us, Doc. We check everything." Farnsworth looked at the coroner. "Maybe it's just as well, Burgess, if you proceed as you intended. File the death certificate. Say nothing to anyone. We'll be in touch with you later."

The coroner ambled to the door. "I'll do as you say, Dr. Farnsworth. But I'd like you to know that I'm neither a plumber nor a bricklayer. I'm a butcher."

"Thank you, Burgess, and quite understandable." Farnsworth offered his hand. "Please forgive my brusqueness, Burgess. I'm somewhat upset."

"What now?" asked Larry. Farnsworth snapped out of his new frown. "Let's go in to see Paul."

The lad looked wilted. His face was pale in discouragement. He was puffing incessantly on a cigarette. "Deeny will be here any minute, Paul," said Farnsworth persuasively. "Brace up. We're here to help."

"I swear, Dr. Farnsworth, that as much as I hated the guy I didn't even touch him up there on the stage today."

"I know that, Paul. I was there."

"He came on stage looking queer. His eyes, I mean."

"Queer in what way?" asked Farnsworth.

"Well, kind of shiny and wide open."

"You mean dilated pupils?"

"Like this," and Paul demonstrated.

"That's interesting, Larry. Ah, here's our Deeny." The girl dashed into the room. She swept into Paul's arms and tears again flooded her face. "Easy, lover." Paul, too, was struggling for composure. "Dr. Farnsworth

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is going to help. That's something, isn't it?" Deeny extended her hand to the old doctor. He took his handkerchief and began to separate the mascara from her tears.

"We're listening to Paul describing Bartolommeo's eyes," said Farnsworth. "Did you notice their dilation, Deeny?"

"Is that what you call it? I've seen it on some actresses who've used belladonna." Farnsworth and Wayne exchanged glances. Deeny removed her wrap. "Bart said he was thirsty, horribly so. And he drank out of the goblet on the refectory table."

"Any significance in that?" asked Captain McDonald.

"He never did it before," she answered.

Farnsworth explained. "Actors seldom touch prop food, Tim. One's mouth must always be prepared for enunciation. And you say, Deeny, that Bartolommeo whispered he was thirsty?"

"Yes. Paul had left the stage momentarily."

"When I came back on the set," continued Paul, "and just before we were to exchange blows, Bart seemed to slow up on his cues. He acted — well, I'd say groggy-like. His forehead was perspired. Great beads of it. I kept prompting him, and several times I had to improvise the lines."

"And when you closed in on him?"

"He fell against me, then slid to the floor."

"Did you notice the doctor who came on stage, Paul?"

"Casually. I guess I was upset myself. Deeny ran to me and I had to quiet her hysterics. The doctor was jabbing a hypodermic into Bart and I think a few minutes later he got the convulsions."

"Convulsions?" asked Farnsworth.

Paul ran his hands over his eyes. "I shall never forget it, I tell you. Bart's heels seemed to grip the floor. Then his head did the same. And he was trying fiercely to lift the centre of his body in the air."

Farnsworth's lips tightened. He nodded to Larry. "Show us on the floor, Paul." The young actor placed his body on the cement floor and went through a gruesome pantomime.

"Where were his hands, Paul?" Farnsworth was now tensed. He knew the answer to this question was going to save the boy's life.

"As though these chest muscles were tightening up on him. He gripped this area, like this —" Paul was demonstrating it accurately. Farnsworth was now thoroughly pitched with excitement. Paul kept trying to raise his stomach in a series of tremors that shook his entire body, the while his heels and head braced themselves on the floor.

"Look at that, Larry, Tim. Do you see it?"

"What is it, Chief?"

Farnsworth was exultant. "You won't find the term in any text-book, Larry. It's my own homely description. It's the *Strychnine Stretch.* Bartolommeo had a series of tremors. He couldn't breathe. He was suffocating.

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He was being smothered internally."

"What is it, Doc?" asked McDonald. "I never saw anything like that."

"Our unknown doctor finished off Bartolommeo by a whopping big shot of strychnine. The maximum dose is one-sixth of a grain."

"And now?" asked McDonald.

Farnsworth looked up. "A real autopsy is in order. Larry and I will attend to that now."

Captain McDonald sauntered in while Dr. Farnsworth, assisted by Larry and a secretary, was adapting the autopsy to paper.

"No ruptured liver. Spleen o.k. No puncture of the lungs. Make sure, Miss Bentley, you get all this down. It's quite important. Let's move into the cardiac area, Larry."

The old man was in his element. "The first autopsy, Larry, may have been done earlier than the 16th Century. It was then that Vesalius, the great anatomist, opened new vistas of thought on post-mortem findings. Morgagni, in the 18th Century, correlated autopsy findings with clinical symptoms. In a room such as this, Laennec followed the tubercular patient to the autopsy table and contributed greatly to our knowledge of that condition. I hope all this does not bore you, Tim."

"Not at all."

"Always open the chest carefully, Larry. And be ready to step aside. If there was an aortic aneurysm, we'd be drenched by the rush of blood. Everything all right here? Let's see. No thrombosis in the coronary artery. That disposes of the unknown doctor's diagnosis as given to Coroner Burgess."

Larry wiped Farnsworth's face with a towel. "I watched Virchow advance his ideas of cellular pathology when I was a student in Berlin. That was in 1901," rambled on the old fellow as he moved up toward the skull. "Osler studied under him. You realize how important this room is, boy?"

Larry nodded in acquiescence. "Now look here. No subdural hemorrhage. I think that should eliminate the contusions Burgess mentioned."

"What about apoplexy, Chief?"

"A good question, Larry. You might be asked that on the stand. We go deeper into the brain structure for that answer. Apoplexy occurs only when a blood vessel breaks far down in the brain tissue. Ah, the Circle of Willis. Familiar territory to these aged fingers, Larry. Do you see any clot here? Your eyes are far keener than mine."

"Nothing there, Chief."

Farnsworth looked toward McDonald. "If all this seems mysterious, Tim, let me explain. We're attempting to eliminate, one by one, the possible causes of death. We're now going to have the chemist analyze the blood, stomach contents, et cetera. We'll first have a qualitative test."

"What's that for?" asked McDonald.

"To unearth what alkaloids may be in the system. Once isolated, we make a quantitative test to determine

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the amount of the alkaloid present."

They washed up and waited for the report. "You've got a honey here, Dr. Farnsworth," said the chemist. "I've never seen such a combination as this." Farnsworth took the paper over to the light.

"Atropine, eh? Expected that after Paul and Deeny described the dilated pupils. But why atropine? And how did Bartolommeo get it?"

The old doctor ran his finger to the next notation. "Scopalamine hydrobromide? That's a sedative. Makes you sleepy. So that's why Bart was groggy."

"And the strychnine, Chief?"

"It's here, Larry. And what a dose! Well, Tim, there it is. Paul wasn't lying."

"How do you figure it out, Doc?" McDonald was now alert. "Why the three drugs? Wouldn't strychnine alone have done the job?"

"Assuredly, Tim, it would. Frankly, I'm puzzled. I'll have to think it out. Meantime, you and Larry have a new assignment. You may have to turn your entire Bureau loose, Tim, to find out what I want. Larry will stay with you. Check every pharmacist's prescription since 8:00 p.m. last night. Call me at the house."

Farnsworth dimmed the lights in the study while he pondered the presence of the three drugs revealed in the autopsy. Atropine. Scopalamine. Strychnine. A trinity of Death! Why? Why? Why?

Mrs. Grady looked in occasionally. "Dinner has been ready for some time. How can a body keep going if you don't eat? Must I force the vittles down your stubborn throat?"

"All right, you old vixen. I'm coming."

She placed the napkin tenderly around his multi-wrinkled neck, just as she had been doing for years and just as though it were a bib for a baby.

"Midge," he said, "did you ever hear of George Bernard Shaw?"

"The only shore I know," she answered, "is the melancholy beach of Donegal."

He smiled mirthfully. "This George Bernard Shaw is Irish, too."

"Then he's the salt of the earth," she said vehemently.

"Shaw disliked murder. Not so much because it wastes the life of the corpse as because it wastes the time of the murderer."

She folded her arms on her ample hips. "What are you gettin' at?"

"I don't want to be a criminologist, Midge. It wastes a lot of my time."

"Then why bother?"

He looked up at the oak beams that crossed the ceiling. "I've been sitting here reviewing the events that began at this very table last night. I feel, Midge, that some devilish mind is at work challenging my thought processes. . . . Did Mr. Gardell bring over the play script?"

"That he did. It's on the library table."

He had eaten sparingly. Now he nibbled at the Melba toast and drank

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the warm milk slowly. Midge left him to his thinking. Atropine. Scopalamine. Strychnine. There must be an answer.

He pushed back his chair and strode into the library. With his wrist-watch as timekeeper he waded into the script. His notations had neared completion when the phone interrupted. Dr. Wayne was reporting.

"We've got 'em, Chief. Three separate prescriptions issued in three different pharmacies."

"Delivered or called for?"

Larry scoffed. "The culprit is no fool, Chief. He called for them. That is, he and two confederates."

"Confederates?"

"Yeah. McDonald and I have their descriptions. One was short, stubby, gray suit, seemed to need a haircut —"

"That's Dr. Rubber Gloves," interrupted Farnsworth.

"One was tall, thin, angular, mustache, sloped shoulders. The third fellow was in-between. Neither fat nor thin. Neither tall nor short. Average build, broad shoulders, dark glasses. He's the one that got the atropine. Said it was for his eyes. And get this, Chief, all three prescriptions were made out to the same party."

"And who was that?" asked Farnsworth eagerly.

"Robert Fortescue Runyan."

"Bartolommeo," swore Farnsworth softly. "Macabre, that's what it is." He brightened up with a new thought. "What doctor wrote the prescriptions, Larry?"

"You're coming to the pay-off, Chief. Brace yourself. They're written on your prescription blanks."

"*Mine?* Why, I never —"

"Of course not, you old bear. It's quite simple. Someone stole them."

Farnsworth clicked his dentures nervously. "One moment, Larry." He dangled the receiver on the bracket while he crossed to the desk in the corner. He scattered his papers about. The blanks were gone. He returned to the phone. "You're right, Larry. They were on my desk last night because I had jotted down the new telephone number of the Stevens Laboratory. Dammit, this *is* a challenge."

"Tim says, 'What now?' "

Farnsworth looked at his watch. It was nearing nine-thirty. "I'm calling on the pharmacists, Larry. Then I'll drop by the theatre. Let's see. The play ends around eleven. Meet me backstage then."

He rang for Midge. She bustled in.

"Has that chap from Headquarters returned?"

"And which one is it now? There's been so many of them runnin' in and out of here in these past six hours that you'd think this was a public comfort station."

"I mean the fingerprint chap."

"Yes, he's gone. Took the glasses and the coffee cups. Said he'd have a report for you immediately."

"Good. I'll call him from the theatre."

"You're going out again?"

"I'm a criminologist now, darling.

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And a criminologist always returns to the scene of the crime."

Again the phone tingled. He swung the bracket toward himself. "Yes. Oh, Mrs. Keller! I don't know what I'd do without the Physicians' Exchange."

"I've phoned Syracuse and Toledo, Dr. Farnsworth, and talked to their local Physicians' Exchange. Although Robert Fortescue Runyan was born in Syracuse, he grew up in Toledo. That's the information Captain McDonald gave me. Runyan returns to Toledo quite often. His family physician will be available to talk to you within a few minutes. I'll switch the call."

He paced the room impatiently. There were many details yet to be checked. He looked at the wall-clock and then at the script. The First Act of "The Shepherd's Call" was nearly over. The understudies for Felippo and Bartolommeo had been called into action. Farnsworth hoped Deeny's performance would hold up under the strain. Where was that call? He did not want to hold the cast too long at the theatre. Poor kids! Carrying on their great tradition in the shadow of a tragedy that even their own play script, devoted to poisoning, would have rejected as incredible.

Yes, the script. It had been well-thumbed by Farnsworth. It had opened several doors of conjecture. But — the phone was ringing.

"This is Dr. Farnsworth. Yes, Mark A. Farnsworth. Why, that's rather nice of you to remember me, Doctor. Three years ago in Toledo, eh? The Ohio State Medical Society? Uh, let me think! Oh, yes, the paper on the Post-Operative Sequelae of Laparectomy. It comes back quite vividly. Now about this fellow Runyan? Keeled over this afternoon on the stage. Something queer about the cause of death."

Farnsworth slipped out of his coat. His pen and pad worked feverishly. "The insurance examination, eh? Lungs, heart, blood, O.K.? Well, yes, there should be some albumen in the specimen at Runyan's age. What's that again? Adipsia. That didn't show up on any physical examination? Don't see how it could. Certainly. The patient would have to describe such a condition. Family history? Yes. Usually adipsia has a subconscious origin. Like all phobias. Thoroughly indebted to you, Doctor."

Gleefully, he replaced the phone. Then climbing again into his topcoat, he went down the stairs to the street. Signaling a cab, he called his directions. "We'll make these three stops. You'll wait for me." The cabby nodded.

The Lafayette Pharmacy gave him scant help. The tall, thin, angular man had his coat drawn over his shoulders, giving a slouched appearance. Nothing unusual. He had insomnia and the doctor prescribed a sedative. At the Debus Pharmacy, the dark-glassed man was uncommunicative. He had broad shoulders, yes. Not tall, no. "This is a busy store, Dr. Farnsworth," said the druggist, "and as much as I'd like to help you,

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I can't possibly recall anything out of the ordinary."

The taxi drew up at the Lockridge-Philips Pharmacy. Dr. Farnsworth explained his mission. "I told your associate," answered Lockridge, "that the prescription was filled this morning, shortly before noontime. I was just leaving for lunch, so I turned the compounding over to Mr. Philips. Yes, he was short, stocky. That's right, gray suit. I'll say he needed a haircut. Yes, ordinarily, we might question the strychnine. But there were to be six powders of one-tenth-grain each. That seemed in order."

"Call Mr. Philips over, please." The druggist called his partner.

"When you filled that strychnine prescription at noontime today, did the stout fellow wait for it or did he return later?" Farnsworth asked.

"He waited. In that chair behind you. But I wouldn't say he was stout. He might have been at one time. His clothes didn't fit very well."

"Slowly," said Dr. Farnsworth, "let's get this straight. You, Mr. Lockridge, said the man was corpulent. Peter says he wasn't. Who's correct?"

"I don't know, Dr. Farnsworth," said Philips. "There was something peculiar about the man. You must understand that I wasn't here when Dr. Wayne called or I would have told him."

"Told him what?"

"Simply this. I was in the back room when Walter, here, tossed your prescription over to me, saying he was going to lunch and would I fill the order for that fat fellow in the gray suit who is sitting outside waiting. We have a little glass slot here in the back room that enables us to look out into the store without us being seen. I took a quick glance and I, too, would have sworn the man was stout."

"And he wasn't?"

Philips smiled somewhat sheepishly. "Maybe it sounds as though I'm nuts, Dr. Farnsworth, but while I was mixing the powders I heard a little explosion. We have some toy balloons for youngsters over there, as you can see. I thought maybe some prankster might have jabbed a balloon. I ran into the store but no one was there — only the stout man. *But now he wasn't stout.*"

"But it was the man in the gray suit who needed a haircut?"

"Yes."

Dr. Farnsworth edged to the door. "I'm grateful to you men."

At the stage door, he found Larry and Captain McDonald awaiting him. "We've got statements from them all, Doc. Few in the cast have been helpful. I've sent the rest home, subject to call."

"Good, Tim. Bring in the first one."

"Eddie Conway, the call boy."

Dr. Farnsworth looked at the boy paternally. "Understand you cried bitterly when Bartolommeo died this afternoon."

"I didn't know he was gonna pass out. I was nasty to him, that's what I was."

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"Nasty? In what way?"

The boy gulped. "When I passed his dressing-room, he says to me, 'Thanks, kid, for bringin' me the sandwich.' I says to him, 'What sandwich?' He says to me, 'Didn't you bring me this rather tasty morsel?' I says to him, 'You're cuckoo. I get paid for callin' you, not feedin' you.' "

"All right, Eddie, you may leave now. Who's next, Tim?"

"This is Miss Franklin, Doctor. She plays that Italian servant in the First Act. You see her when the curtain rises."

"Oh, yes. Can you throw any light on this situation, Miss Franklin?"

"Not very much. I told Captain McDonald that I always make it a point to fill the three goblets with fresh water. This afternoon was the first time one of them had been partly emptied. I told Miss Corson how unusual it was."

"And you didn't see Bartolommeo drink from the glass?"

"No. I'm off-stage for some time. But the half-empty goblet was at his seat in the refectory."

"You didn't notice any powder in the bottom of the glass before you poured the water in?"

"It would be difficult to see. The goblets are amber."

"Thank you, Miss Franklin. One more question. You told Captain McDonald that you observed a stranger around while the property man was checking the set?"

"Yes. I thought he might be a new stage hand. Frequently, they change men. He knew his way around the drops."

"What did he look like?"

"I'm not so keen on descriptions, Doctor. I remember, though, he wore dark glasses."

Larry stepped forward. "Were his shoulders this broad? — as though they belonged to a football player?"

"Yes, that would describe him."

Larry looked toward Dr. Farnsworth. "That's Mr. Atropine, Chief." Farnsworth agreed. "Right, Larry. He had just been upstairs with the atropine and he came downstairs with the scopalamine."

McDonald squinted. "Upstairs with the atropine?"

"The sandwich, Tim."

"Sprinkled on it?"

"Or imbedded in it. The atropine sulphate is a white crystal. No odor, but a bitter taste. Bartolommeo could have mistaken it for an extra shaking of salt."

Farnsworth dismissed the girl. He called to Deeny, "Would you guide us to the dressing-rooms?"

Deeny led the three men up the iron stairway. "The dressing-rooms open on these two tiers, the girls on this one and the men upstairs." They continued the climb.

The journey upward was a tax on Dr. Farnsworth's antique legs. His puffing indicated the short breath of vascular changes. He had to recline on Paul's couch for several minutes.

"Paul shares this dressing-room with Lee Beckx, who has a brief appearance as a police official."

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"Take us to Bartolommeo's room."

Farnsworth looked into the waste basket. It was empty.

They advanced down the hall. "This room here?"

"That," replied Deeny, "is for the extras who play in the mob scene during the Third Act."

Larry, ahead of the others, strolled through the fourth dressing-room. Around him was the usual disarray of special make-up creams and rouge. The mirror was gently sprinkled with powder dust. Larry reached to a hook on the wall and drew down a circular band of rubber. "Look, Chief," he called out, "we still have a shortage of tires and here's a chap who leaves an inner tube carelessly on the premises."

Dr. Farnsworth and Captain McDonald sauntered in. "An inner tube? Is that what you call it, Larry?" The old man examined it carefully. "Do you know what this is, Tim?"

"Looks like a rubber reducing belt to me."

"You're both wrong. Notice these valves. They permit the introduction and expulsion of air. That's why Larry thought it was an inner tube."

"Well, what is it?"

"A pneumatic stomach. One may blow it up and change his entire appearance. A thin man can become a stout man and vice versa. A lot of the cobwebs are being brushed away, boys. Whoever has been using this stomach could have been three different persons calling for different distinct prescriptions. I can also believe that Dr. Rubber Gloves was also Dr. Rubber Stomach. Is that closet open, Tim?"

McDonald turned the knob. "Locked," he said.

"Deeny, who uses this dressing-room?"

"The stage manager. For a storeroom."

At a nod from Farnsworth, Tim called down to Beckx. "Will you come up, please?"

"Lee, do you have a key to this closet?" asked Dr. Farnsworth.

"Sure. We keep certain properties in here that are difficult to replace if they're lost."

"Do you keep your topcoat in here?"

Beckx laughed easily. "You should know better than that. You tried to walk off with it this afternoon."

"Not I, Lee. 'Twas our friend, Dr. Rubber Stomach, alias Dr. Rubber Gloves, alias Dr. Atropine — Scopalamine — Strychnine."

Beckx opened the closet. A welter of clocks, lamps, an Italian hand-organ, objets d'art, paste jewels, stood in orderly arrangement. On a hanger was a gray suit and a blue suit, neatly draped. But on the floor, as though dropped in a hurry, was a black bag, dark glasses and a wig. Farnsworth dropped quickly to the bag and opened it. Inside were rubber gloves, a hypodermic syringe, and some paper slips. Farnsworth opened the papers and dumped the white needles in his palm. He looked up at McDonald. "Strychnine! The end of my training period, Tim. I think I've earned my

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diploma." He turned to Beckx. "Lee, will you get Helland and Gardell over here? They will accompany Captain McDonald to my home. There are two exhibits claiming our attention before we close a very busy day."

It was midnight before the same guests who had bedecked it just twenty-eight hours before gathered around Dr. Farnsworth's table.

Mrs. Grady had set out some sandwiches, coffee and petits fours. The cocktail and cordial glasses were arrayed before them. Paul, released in the custody of Captain McDonald, sat snuggled closely to Deeny.

"Is this a séance, Doctor?" asked Beefy Helland.

"No. I'd rather call it another disquisition on the Theatre. In three parts, Beefy. To wit, stage food, stage wigs, stage props."

"At least you won't bore us," commented Gardell.

"It's regrettable," continued Dr. Farnsworth, "that my hospitality of last evening should have been violated by someone who sat at this table and heard Captain McDonald relate an apparently innocuous tale of a little girl and her bottle of milk. For that story unleashed a most ingenious murder."

Dr. Wayne looked at the faces around the table. Gardell, imperturbable; Beckx, credulous; Helland, alert; Deeny and Paul, anxious. Farnsworth was rambling on. "Evidently our homicidal friend had planned for some time to remove Paul as a rival for Miss Corson's affections. He changed his plans when he learned last night that Paul Calvert had a police record. Why should he now kill Paul? The murder might be traced to him. Why not have Bartolommeo killed in such a way that Paul would be charged with murder?"

Farnsworth paused. "To kill Bart so that Paul would be accused of his death required a thorough knowledge of the script. It was a matter of delicate timing."

"That brings the case closely to Beefy and me," spoke up the stage manager.

"Somewhat, Lee. The First Act is under way exactly twelve and one half minutes when Felippo and Bartolommeo begin their quarrel. Our Mr. X placed atropine in a sandwich in Bart's dressing-room so that he would come on stage with an uncontrollable thirst. The atropine is belladonna, Deeny, if you wish to know why Bart's eyes were dilated and shiny." Farnsworth studied their rapt interest. "The thirst would compel Bart to drink from an amber goblet on the stage. That goblet contained scopalamine hydrobromide, a colorless, odorless sedative that made your antagonist groggy, Paul. Are you following me?"

"I am."

"And why this delicate timing? Look at the script here for the answer. Paul and Bart should exchange blows in twenty-one and one-half minutes of the First Act. Bart had to be groggy

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at that moment. And he was. That, Paul, was why you noticed the perspiration on Bart's forehead after he drank the scopalamine." Farnsworth sipped his brandy.

"Our Mr. X knew what Bart's collapse would call for. Is there a doctor in the house? Mr. X was the doctor. He sat next to me. And he went up on the stage and finished off Bart with strychnine sulphate. That's the bare outline. There are details to fill in and I shall give you all that you need."

"Why did Mr. X use a sandwich, Doc?" asked Captain McDonald. "Why didn't he slip the atropine into a drink?"

"A good question, Tim. Have you had any experience with adipsia, Larry?"

Larry smiled indulgently. "Chief, I'm only a baby in the medical game. Let me grow up."

"Then out with your notebook. This might come up in Court some day and there is no substitute for knowledge. From the etiology of this adipsia, as I gathered it from Bart's family physician in Toledo, Bart's father was a dipsomaniac. Could never get enough liquor. Went off on 'benders' that lasted for a week. Used to strike Bart's mother and often abused Bart. Adipsia is a condition in which the sensation of thirst is absent — or in which drinking is shunned. I am willing to believe that Bart acquired this phobia as a mental revulsion against his father's conduct. Members of this company, Tim, often invited Bart to a Scotch and soda; isn't that so, Paul?"

"Yes."

"And has anyone ever seen Bart take liquids of any kind?"

"I've seen him drink tea," said Deeny. "But it was an awful ordeal. Used to close his eyes and gulp it as though in agony."

Farnsworth looked at Tim. "Hence the sandwich. Now do you realize what a brain has been at work devising Bart's exit? An extraordinary person, Tim! Our Mr. X has a really expert knowledge of drug administration. Thanks to Larry, we uncovered his background. Before coming to the theatre with his diversified talents, he was known by another name. He changed it after his senior year. He would have had a degree in chemical engineering but for an unfortunate accident to a fellow-student. I say 'accident' advisedly. Honor student expelled, so the university campus paper stated."

Dr. Farnsworth paused while he drew an envelope from his pocket.

"And now, Mr. Helland, let's have the disquisition I promised. Part One is titled 'Stage Food.' While you people pranced about my lawn up in Connecticut last Fall, I discovered Mr. X's singular gifts. When I told him that my father had taken me, as a mere lad, to a performance of 'The Wary Widow,' which incidentally was written away back in 1693, he wanted to know if it were true that the actors became blotto from drinking all of the punch that the script called for. I

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doubt, Tim, if there are more than a dozen people of the stage world who could have asked that question. He knew that 'Macbeth' called for a wine party. And he was intrigued that they served real macaroni in 'Masaniello' and that 'Don Giovanni' required champagne. He could hold his own in this conversational exchange. For he also knew that the old Scotch melodrama 'Cramond Brig' served a real sheep's head for the actors to eat."

"What about Part Two?" inquired Beckx. "Stage Wigs?"

"That follows," said Farnsworth. "Without false hair, the fictions of the stage could scarcely unfold. Some may play King Lear with the customary beard, but David Garrick, as his portraits revealed, played the part clean-shaven. Dave loved to be recognized. Our Mr. X could not afford to be. The ghost of Hamlet's father might walk the platform of Elsinore Castle without a sable-silvered chin. But our Mr. X, thoroughly versed in the drama, had three characters to play in order to obtain three prescriptions and enact the role of the doctor in the house. What was it Hamlet said to Lucianus, the poisoner . . .

'Begin murderer, leave thy damnable faces and begin' . . .

. . . well, our Mr. X left his faces upstairs in a dressing-room closet. He did not intend to. But he was frightened away during his change of costume. He would return for them later; but, unfortunately, we have come upon his cache and I believe, Tim, you will have marked them as Exhibits for the *State versus Mr. X.*"

At this point Farnsworth chuckled. "Our man was in such a hurry that he let air out of his pneumatic stomach too rapidly. It dropped on the floor where some passerby, not knowing what it was, placed it on a hook where Larry discovered it. That was the second time the stomach dropped on our man. The first time was in the Lockridge-Philips Pharmacy shortly before noon-time today. Mr. Philips mistook the puncture for a bursting of a toy balloon. . . . Mr. X's penumatic stomach gave him whatever shape his disguise called for. When he sat next to me in the theatre this afternoon, he had the wig on."

Paul whistled. "Now I recall —" Deeny tugged at him for silence. Dr. Farnsworth walked around the table.

"And that introduces us to Part Three. Stage Props. Dumbbell that I am, I thought he needed a haircut!"

"The pneumatic stomach should have been sufficient disguise," said Paul. "Why the wig?"

The old doctor smiled at Paul. "*Because Mr. Gardell had to hide his carbuncle.*"

Deeny gasped. Paul half-rose toward Gardell. Larry pulled him back into his chair.

No emotion showed in the producer's face. He was perfectly self-controlled. "I hate histrionics, Farnsworth, when there is no box-office. I assume you can go far beyond this

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interesting and droll hypothesis. How can you and your friend McDonald convince any jury that it's factual?"

"That's a fair question, Gardell. I think your attorney might ask me that if you ever go to trial, which I doubt. So I'll answer you. Last night, at this table, you drank from this glass. . . . Glass Number Four." Farnsworth opened the envelope. "Would you like to see your fingerprints?"

Gardell sneered. "I don't deny that's my fingerprint. I was your guest here."

Farnsworth drew a second envelope from his pocket. "One of your little mistakes, Gardell. You didn't expect when you came down the theatre aisle this afternoon, Beckx's topcoat on your arm, that I would be seated on the end. You had arranged that I would sit next to you. A challenge to me, that's what it was. But unfortunately for you, I could show the stub for the end seat. You didn't want me to reach the stage ahead of you when the summons came for the doctor in the house. So, we exchanged stubs. Remember?"

"So what?"

"You, who were so careful as to wear rubber gloves while administering the strychnine, forgot about the stub, didn't you? Would you like to read this report from the Detective Bureau as to whose fingerprints are on that stub?"

Gardell smiled sardonically. "And what makes you think I won't go to trial?"

"Because no supreme egotist would endure such a public spectacle, with its constant reminder of the little mistake that tripped you up. Because with your ready access to poisons —"

"Daresay you're right," Gardell interrupted. "And now, Captain McDonald, shall we go? No handcuffs, please. Haven't you heard Farnsworth testify to my choice of exit?"

Deeny overwhelmed the old man with her kisses. Paul hugged him, too. Then Beckx and Beefy pumped his hand before saying goodnight.

Larry poured coffee for them all. "A swell job, Chief. Wasn't it, Paul? Shows what reading can do for you."

A roguish smile played on the old man's face. "A little more reading might have helped Gardell."

"What do mean by that, Chief?"

Dr. Farnsworth tossed the report from the Detective Bureau across the table to Larry. He read it with a smile on his face. The report was cryptic:

> It is impossible to obtain a clear print from such a small, smooth pasteboard as presented in Exhibit #35497. It is evident that the stub was handled by the printer, the box-office employee, the doorman and the usher. Nothing but blurred images appear.

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For the text of the following "unknown" piece by Gilbert K. Chesterton we are indebted to John Bennett Shaw, 1381 East 26th Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma, who is, in his own words, "a long-time collector of G.K.C., now having over 500 books and over 1000 periodical excerpts" in his remarkable collection. Mr. Shaw's good friend Martin Gardner put your Editor on the Shavian trail that led to our purchasing the reprint rights to Chesterton's "Advice to Literary Murderers."

Mr. Shaw also wrote: "As I have read every word in every issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, I am naturally overjoyed to get the Chesterton article in your hands." The article appeared in a book titled THE TRIBUTE *— a gift volume "Tendered by Artists, Authors and Advertisers of the Empire on the Anniversary of His Majesty's Recovery." The book was edited by D. Mackenzie and published by John Horn of London in 1930.*

Mr. Shaw hopes in a few years to compile a much-needed Chesterton bibliography. He would welcome correspondence from other collectors and lovers of G.K.C., with a view to exchanging items and information, so that his prospective bibliography will be as comprehensive and accurate as possible. Rally round, readers! — that is why we gave you Mr. Shaw's address . . .

ADVICE TO LITERARY MURDERERS

by GILBERT K. CHESTERTON

In a long, wasted and vicariously wicked life passed chiefly in the reading of murder stories (on which works I have relied to teach me all the graver and stern realities of existence), I have learned the repeated lesson that a murderer always makes one mistake. The writer of the murder story generally makes six or seven mistakes. There are indeed some fastidious moralists who will have it that a murder is itself a mistake; and some who seem to think that it is almost as much of a mistake to describe a murder as to commit one. I once knew a man who was sincerely shocked to find me writing stories of crime, or even reading them; and the incident always interested me because he was the only man I ever knew personally who was afterwards found to be a criminal. It has been urged that his objection to detective stories was not an objection to a crime being done but to it being detected. But I cannot believe that any intelligent criminal, with whom I had associated, could possibly suppose that I was capable of detecting anything. I have indeed written tales of detection and shame-

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lessly enjoyed doing it; have even become deeply absorbed in the occupation — so absorbed that I am quite sure that a corpse might have fallen down my chimney, a fleeing murderer vaulted over my chair, a shower of bullets rattled about my room, a huge splash of blood fallen on my blotting-paper, the scream of a strangled banker echoed through my house, or even the appalling sign of the Magenta Jellyfish, the message of the Siberian Secret Society which strikes terror into so many million quiet suburban homes, have been carefully and laboriously plastered on my window or painted on my wall, without for one moment distracting my attention from my duties as a literary detective. Writers of detective fiction are seldom consulted by detectives, I imagine; they do sometimes appear as characters in the same sort of romances which they are supposed to write; but they have really very little business there, unless it is to be murdered. Real murder is a matter which they will do well to avoid. The habit of killing will distract them from their more delicate responsibilities; the habit of being killed will seriously interrupt their artistic career. Many a literary man can sit happily by his own peaceful fireside, devising fifteen or twenty ways of murdering his wife, out of each of which he can extract pecuniary profit in turn; and yet retain the wife after all. Whereas if he is so rash a realist as to attempt any one of them as a material experiment, he will not only run the risk of losing or damaging a valuable wife (which even in the cause of art he would in many ways regret) but he will be henceforth unable to use any of the other fourteen methods upon her, and he may possibly find that even this one paltry and preliminary exercise has involved him in serious trouble and inconvenience. It is obviously wiser to keep the first fresh fragrance of all the fifteen murders, complete and satisfactory upon their own plane, and not risk the rest by reducing one of them to a plane of daily life, where such things are but little understood or appreciated. Whether he should explain to the wife that she has been the inspiration of so many imaginative crimes, the Muse of Murders, as it were, must depend upon the theory of artistic self-sufficiency; and upon the wife.

On the understanding that I deal here with ideal murder, and not with its application in real, daily or domestic murder, and that I project it in fancy rather upon others than myself, I feel emboldened to say a few words of advice to the manufacturer of literary murders; and to point out some of those mistakes of which I have spoken. After all, the assassin and the literary man have the same essential moral object, and can go hand in hand to perform it. That ideal, that bond between them, is the desire to conceal the crime; the criminal desiring to conceal it from the police, the writer desiring to conceal it from the reader. And, as I have said, if the criminal

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makes one mistake, the writer makes many. I am myself a writer; and I am quite willing to admit that I may have made very little else. Nevertheless I will make bold, for the sake of brevity, to arrange these mistakes in order, in the form of a series of warnings.

First, may I suggest to all my fellow murder-mongers that the time has now come for cutting out altogether the early chapter devoted to the Hero as Suspect. The early part of the story has generally been stuffed with unconvincing coincidences, merely to create a momentary case against the First Walking Gentleman or Good Young Man. Now the object of this noble form of art is to deceive; to mislead the reader; and by this time no reader is ever deceived even for a moment by this part of the story.

There is a frank, flaxen-haired, athletic young man, who plays cricket and is happily in love with the good and beautiful heroine. Nobody in the world ever imagines for a moment that he is the murderer. If he were really discovered to be the murderer, at the *end* of the book, it would be a rather original and staggering sort of story. But when he is only suspected at the beginning of the book, there is nothing before us but the bore of clearing him by more coincidences. It is sheer waste of time to watch policemen suspecting somebody whom we cannot suspect.

Second, let us agree to cut out that long diversion in the middle of the book, in which the detective starts out somewhere after somebody and comes back to *precisely* where he was before. The Major is murdered in Surrey; the detective is told that somebody who might be the murderer lives in Arizona; he goes to Arizona, discovers that the man is no more concerned than the man in the moon, and comes back again to Surrey. This is inconsequence; let us say sternly that this is padding. There is an implied point of honour that the story should be moving *towards* its solution. There should not be a long loop that could be snipped off without making any difference to the real knot.

Third, in a more general way, one of the fallacies that falsify the art is the notion that we have chiefly to baffle the reader.

It is easy enough to baffle the reader, by throwing things in his path which he could not possibly understand. The true art is to throw things that he could understand, and ought to understand, but doesn't understand. But in this matter let none be deceived, for it applies to deeper things than detective stories. Men can only follow light; the excitement is in having only a little light to follow. But nobody can *follow* fog; nobody can be even excited by what is merely formless. If we baffle the reader so that he really cannot make sense of what he is reading, he will call it senseless and read no more. He will be right.

Fourth, I would repeat with a wail of imprecation what I think I have

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remarked elsewhere but would willingly repeat everywhere.

Avoid the Magenta Jellyfish; keep a thousand miles away from the Siberian Secret Society; not because it threatens your life but your literary soul. A vast organisation of crime is as dull as a vast organisation of collected statistics; it makes even murder mild and commonplace. The whole justification of this sort of romance, though it may be a fanciful and in one sense even a frivolous romance, is that it does after all in some way involve the human soul.

Somebody, if it be only the butler (and I would discourage bringing the crime home to butlers), has really decided in his own heart, out of his own hatred, alone with his own God, to accept the brand of Cain. When that brand is reduplicated with a rubber stamp, like a trade-mark, it is the end of all story-telling.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will include two prize-winning stories:

THE QUARTERDECK CLUB by *Leslie Charteris*

PEOPLE DO FALL DOWNSTAIRS by *Elisabeth Sanxay Holding*

and

WHERE THERE'S A WILL by *Agatha Christie*

BIG SHOT by *Brett Halliday*

THE CASE OF THE FRENCHMAN'S GLOVES by *Margery Allingham*

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T EXIST by *Rufus King*

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Here is Lillian de la Torre's own description of Dr. Sam: Johnson, eighteenth-century detector of crime and chicanery: His person was large, robust, approaching to the gigantic and grown unwieldy from corpulency. His countenance was naturally of the cast of an ancient statue, but somewhat disfigured by the scars of that evil which it was formerly imagined the royal touch would cure. In his sixty-fourth year he had become a little dull of hearing. His sight had always been weak, yet so much does mind govern and even supply the deficiency of organs that his perceptions were uncommonly quick and accurate. His head, and sometimes his body, shook with a kind of motion like the effect of a palsy; he appeared to be frequently disturbed by convulsive contractions of the nature of that distemper called St. Vitus's dance. He wore a full suit of plain brown clothes with twisted-hair buttons of the same color, a large bushy grayish wig, black worsted stockings, and silver buckles. He had a loud voice and a slow deliberate utterance which gave additional weight to the sterling metal of his conversation. He had a constitutional melancholy the clouds of which darkened the brightness of his fancy and gave a gloomy cast to his whole course of thinking; yet he frequently indulged himself in pleasantry and sportive sallies. He was prone to superstition but not to credulity. Though his imagination might incline him to a belief of the marvellous, his vigorous reason examined the evidence with jealousy . . . Thus the Great Cham of Literature, the Sage of Fleet Street, and one of the most endearing detectival conceptions of this or any other time.

THE MISSING SHAKESPEARE MANUSCRIPT

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

(as related by James Boswell after the Shakespeare Jubilee, Stratford, September, 1769)

'TWAS Dr. Sam: Johnson, in the end, who returned the missing Shakespeare manuscript at the Stratford Jubilee; though in the beginning he would not so much as look at it. He preferred to hug the fire at the Red Lion Inn.

"Do, Dr. Johnson," I urged, "give me your company to Mr. Ararat's though you come but to scoff."

"I shall not remain to pray, I promise you," rejoined the great *Cham* of literature intransigeantly.

"So much is unnecessary," I replied, "but indeed I have promised we would there meet with Dr. Percy and his young friend Malone, the Irish lawyer."

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"This is very proper for Thomas Percy and his scavenging friends," remarked Dr. Johnson, lifting his coat-tails before the blaze, "for they are very methodists in the antiquarian *enthusiasm*. But truly this is ill for a scholar, to run with the vulgar after a parcel of old waste paper."

"Sir, sir," I protested, "the antiquarian zeal of Mr. Ararat has preserved to us a previously unknown tragedy of Shakespeare, 'Caractacus; or, the British Hero'."

"Which little Davy Garrick is to represent in the great amphitheatre tomorrow night. Let him do so. Let us see him do so. Let us not meddle with the musty reliques of the writing desk."

"Musty!" I cried. "Let me tell you this is no musty old dog's-eared folio that has lost its wrappings for pyes or worse, like the ballad-writings Percy cherishes, but a manuscript as fair and unblemished, so Dr. Warton assures me, as the day it came from the bard's own hand. By singular good luck Mr. Ararat is of antiquarian mind, and the manuscript was preserved from a noisome fate in the out-house."

"That it was preserved for Garrick to play and Dodsley to publish, this is luck indeed; but now that the playhouse copies are taken off, it may end in the out-house for all of me," replied my learned friend. "No, sir; let a good play be well printed and well played; but to idolize mere paper and ink is rank superstition and idolatry."

"Why, sir, you need not adore it, nor look at it if you will not; but pray let us not disappoint Dr. Percy and his young friend."

Dr. Johnson's good nature was not proof against this appeal to friendship; he consented to walk along with me to Mr. Ararat's.

I made haste to don my hat and be off before anything could supervene. As we set off on foot from the yard of the Red Lion, my revered friend peered at me with puckered eyes.

"Pray, Mr. Boswell," he enquired in tones of forced forbearance, "what is the writing inserted in your hat?"

I doffed the article in question and gazed admiringly at the neatly inscribed legend which adorned it.

"CORSICA BOSWELL," read off my learned friend in tones of disgust. "Corsica Boswell! Pray, what commodity are you touting, Mr. Boswell, that you advertize the world of your name in this manner?"

"A very precious commodity," I retorted with spirit, "liberty for down-trodden Corsica. Do but attend the great masquerade tonight, you shall see how I speak for Corsica."

"Well, sir, you may speak for whom you will, and advertize Stratford of your name as you please. For me, let me remain *incognito*. I should be loath to parade about Stratford as DICTIONARY JOHNSON."

"Say rather," I replied, "as SHAKESPEARE JOHNSON, for your late edition of the Bard must endear you to the town of his birth."

"I come to Stratford," remarked Dr. Johnson with finality, "to observe

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men and manners, and not to tout for my wares."

"Be it so," I replied, "here is material most proper for your observation."

As I spoke, we were crossing the public square, which teemed with bewildered Stratfordians and jostling strangers. The center of a milling crowd, a trumpeter was splitting the air with his blasts and loudly proclaiming:

"Ladies and gentlemen! The famous Sampson is just going to begin — just going to mount four horses at once with his feet upon two saddles — also the most wonderful surprizing feats of horsemanship by the most *notorious* Mrs. Sampson."

A stringy man and an Amazon of a woman seconded his efforts by giving away inky bills casting further light on their own notorious feats. As we strolled on, we met a man elbowing his way through the press beating a drum and shouting incessantly:

"The notified Porcupine Man, and all sorts of outlandish birds and other beasts to be seen without loss of time on the great meadow near the amphitheatre at so small a price as one shilling a piece. Alive, alive, alive, ho."

Behind him came a man leading a large bin, and a jostling crowd following. Dr. Johnson smiled.

"This foolish fellow will scarce make his fortune at the Jubilee," he remarked. "Who will pay a shilling to see strange animals in a house, when a man may see them for nothing going along the streets, alive, alive, ho?"

As we walked along, Dr. Johnson marvelled much at the elegant art of the decorations displayed about the town. The town hall was adorned with five transparencies on silk — in the center Shakespeare, flanked by Lear and Caliban, Falstaff and Pistol. The humble cottage where Shakespeare was born, gave me those feelings which men of enthusiasm have on seeing remarkable places; and I had a solemn and serene satisfaction in contemplating the church in which his body lies.

Dr. Johnson, however, took a more lively interest in the untutored artistry of the townsfolk of Stratford, who had everywhere adorned their houses, according to their understanding and fantasy, in honour of their Bard. We read many a rude legend displayed to the glorification of Shakespeare and Warwickshire. We beheld many a crude portrait intended for the great playwright, and only a few less libels on the lineaments of David Garrick, as we strolled down to Mr. Ararat's.

"This is Garrick's misfortune, that as steward of the Jubilee, he is man of the hour," remarked Dr. Johnson, "for the admiration of Warwickshire has done him no less wrong than the lampoons of London."

"In Shakespeare he has a notable fellow-sufferer," I replied.

JOHNSON "You say true, Bozzy. Alack, Bozzy, do my eyes inform me true as to the nature of the small building, set apart, which someone has seen fit to adorn with the

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honoured features of the Bard?"

BOSWELL "Your eyes inform you truly. We are approaching the stationer's shop of Mr. Ararat, whose zeal for Shakespeare extends even to adorning the exterior of his outhouse with the counterfeit presentment of the Bard."

JOHNSON "Better his face without than his works within."

BOSWELL "Sir, the antiquarian zeal of Mr. Ararat, 'tis said, extends even so far, for he provides for the convenience of his household a pile of old accounts of wonderful and hoary antiquity. The Stratfordians are long dead and gone who bought the paper for which the reckoning still awaits a last usefulness."

JOHNSON "Let Mr. Ararat keep Thomas Percy out of here. Last year he published the Earl of Northumberland's reckonings for bread and cheese from the year 1512; next year, unless he's watched, I'll be bound, he'll rush to the press with a parcel of stationer's accounts he's *borrowed* from Ararat's out-house."

BOSWELL "Sir, you wrong Thomas Percy. He's a notable antiquarian and his works are much sought after."

JOHNSON "He's a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, and that young Irishman who's followed him hither is no better. Sir, be it a Shakespeare manuscript or a publican's reckoning, just so it be old, I'd watch it narrowly while Percy is about."

Speaking thus, we turned the corner, when the full complexity of Mr. Ararat's decorative scheme struck us at once. Limned by an unskillful hand, the characters of Shakespeare's plays crowded the ancient facade, dominated under the gabled roof by the lineaments of the Bard, for which the portrait on the necessary-house was clearly a preliminary study. Hamlet leaned a melancholy elbow on the steep gable of the window, Macbeth and Macduff fought with claymores over the front door, a giant warrior guarded the corner post, all endued with a weird kind of life in the gray glare of the sky, for a storm was threatening.

"Ha," said Dr. Johnson, "who is this painted chieftain? Can it be Cymbeline?"

"No, sir, this is Caractacus, hero of the new play just recovered."

JOHNSON "Why has he painted himself like an Onondaga?"

BOSWELL "Sir, he is an ancient Briton. He has painted himself with woad."

JOHNSON "Will little Davy Garrick paint himself blue?"

BOSWELL "I cannot say, sir, though 'tis known he means to present the character in ancient British dress."

JOHNSON "This is more of your *antiquarianism*. Let Davy Garrick but present a *man*, he may despise the fribbles of the tiring-room."

As we thus stood chatting before the stationer's shop, a strange creature insinuated himself before us. From his shoulder depended a tray full of oddments.

"Tooth pick cases, needle cases,

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punch ladles, tobacco stoppers, inkstands, nutmeg graters, and all sorts of boxes, made out of the famous mulberry tree," he chanted.

"Pray, sir, shall we venture?"

"Nay, Bozzy, the words of the bard are the true metal, his mulberry tree is but dross. You seem determined to make a papistical idolator of me."

"Yet perhaps this box —" I indicated a wooden affair large enough for a writing-desk — "this box is sufficiently useful in itself —"

With a resentful scowl the man snatched it rudely from my hand.

"'Tis not for sale," he mumbled, and ran down the street with his boxes hopping.

"Are all the people mad?" quoted Dr. Johnson from the "Comedy of Errours"; and the shop bell tinkled to herald our entrance into the stationer's shop of Mr. Ararat.

Behind the counter in the dim little shop stood a solid-built man in a green baize apron. He had a sanguine face fringed with gingery whiskers and a sanguine bald top fringed with gingery hair. This was Mr. Ararat, stationer of Stratford, Shakespearean enthusiast, and owner of the precious manuscript of "Caractacus; or, the British Hero." He spelled out the sign on my hat and gave me a low bow.

"Welcome, Mr. Boswell, to you and your friend."

We greeted Mr. Ararat with suitable distinction. Being made known to Dr. Johnson, he greeted him with surprised effusion.

"This is indeed an unlooked-for honour, Dr. Johnson," cried Mr. Ararat.

"Percy is late," I observed to Dr. Johnson.

"Dr. Percy was here, and has but stepped out for a moment," Mr. Ararat informed us.

We whiled away the time of waiting by examining the honest stationer's stock, and Dr. Johnson purchased some of his laid paper, much to my surprise to good advantage. As the parcel was wrapping Thomas Percy put his long nose in at the door, and followed it by his neat person attired in clerical black. He laid his parcel on the counter and took Dr. Johnson by both his hands.

"We must count ourselves fortunate," he cried, "to have attracted Dr. Johnson hither. I had feared we could never lure you from Brighthelmstone, where the witty and fair conspired to keep you."

"Why, sir, the witty and fair, if by those terms you mean to describe Mrs. Thrale, took a whim that the sea air gave her a megrim, and back she must post to Streatham; and I took a whim not to wait upon her whims, so off I came for Stratford."

"We are the gainers," cried Percy.

Dr. Johnson's eye fell on the counter, where lay his package of paper and the exactly similar parcel Percy had laid down. He picked up the latter.

"Honest Mr. Ararat does well by us Londoners," he remarked, "to sell us fine paper so cheap."

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"Yes, sir," replied Percy, possessing himself of his parcel with more haste than was strictly mannerly, "you see I know how to prize new folios as well as old, ha ha."

He gripped his parcel, and during the whole of our exciting transactions in the house of Mr. Ararat it never left his hands again.

At that moment the shop-bell tinkled to admit a stranger. I saw a fresh-faced Irishman with large spiritual eyes the colour of brook water, a straight nose long at the tip, and a delicate smiling mouth. He was shabbily dressed in threadbare black. The new-comer nodded to Percy, and made a low bow to my venerable friend.

"Your servant, Dr. Johnson," he exclaimed in a soft mellifluous voice, "Permit me to recall myself — Edmond Malone, at your service. I had the honour to be made known to you some years since by my countryman Edmund Southwell."

"I remember it well," replied Dr. Johnson cordially, "'Twas at the Grecian, in the Strand. I had a kindness for Southwell."

"He will be happy to hear it," replied Malone.

'Twas thus that I, James Boswell, the Scottish advocate, not quite twenty-nine, met Edmond Malone, the Irish lawyer, then in the twenty-eighth year of his age, who was destined to become — but I digress.

Our party being complete, we repaired into the inner room and were accommodated with comfortable chairs. Seated by the chimney-piece was a boy of about sixteen, a replica of old Mr. Ararat, with a rough red mop of hair and peaked red eyebrows. He looked at us without any expression on his round face.

"'Tis Anthony," said his father with pride, "Anthony's a good boy."

"What do you read so diligently, my lad?" enquired Dr. Johnson kindly, peering at the book the boy held. "Johnson's *Shakespeare!* I am honoured!"

'Nay, sir, 'tis we who are honoured," said Malone fervently. "To inspect the Shakespeare manuscript in the company of him who knows the most in England of the literature of our country and the plays of the Bard, to read the literature of yesterday in the presence of Dictionary Johnson, who knows the age and lineage of every English word from the oldest to the word minted but yesterday, this is to savour the fine flower of scholarship."

The red-haired boy turned his eyes toward Dr. Johnson.

"Pray, sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "don't cant. In restoring a lost play this worthy boy has deserved as well as I of his fellow-Englishmen."

"Anthony's a good boy," said his father with pride, "he knows the plays of Shakespeare by heart, 'Caractacus' included."

I looked at Anthony, and doubted it.

"Shall you make him a stationer, like his fathers before him?" enquired Dr. Percy politely.

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"No, sir," replied Ararat, "he's prenticed to old Mr Quiney the scrivener over the way. Here, Anthony, fetch my strong-box, we'll show the gentleman what they came to see."

Anthony nodded, and went quickly out of the room.

"This is a great good fortune,"said Dr. Percy eagerly, "to see the very writing of Shakespeare himself.. We are your debtors that it has been preserved."

"'Tis nothing," but old Ararat began to swell like a turkey-cock. He launched into the story: "The first Anthony Ararat was a stationer in Stratford, like me, and Will Shakespeare was his neighbour. Anthony saved his life in the Avon, and in recompense he had of Will the manuscript of this very play, 'Caractacus; or, the British Hero', to be his and his children's forever. Old Anthony knew how to value it, for he folded it in silk, and laid with it a writing of how he came by it, and laid it away with his accounts and private papers."

"Then how came it to be lost?" enquired Dr. Percy.

"'Twas my grandmother, sir, who took the besom to all the old papers together, and bundled one with another into the shed, and there they lay over the years with the lumber and the stationer's trash. I played in there when I was a boy, and so did Anthony after me. I remember, there was paper in there my father said his grandfather had made when he was prenticed in the paper-mills. But I never turned over the old accountings, nor paid them any heed. But to make a long story short, gentlemen, come Jubilee time I thought to turn an honest penny letting lodgings, so I bade Anthony turn out the lumber in the shed and make a place where the horses could stand. Anthony turned out a quantity of waste-paper and lumber, and my mother's marriage lines that went missing in '28, and the manuscript of 'Caractacus', wrapped in silk as the first Anthony had laid it by. He had the wit to bring it to me, and I took it over to old Mr. Quiney the engrosser, and between us we soon made out what we had. Warton of Trinity rode over from Oxford, and Mr. Garrick came down from London and begged to play it . . ."

The words died in his throat. I followed his gaze toward the inner door. There stood young Anthony, pale as death. Tears were streaming down his wet face. Angrily he dashed the drops from his shoulder. In his hand he held a brass-bound coffer, about the size of the mulberry-wood box the pedlar had snatched from us. Wordlessly, though his throat constricted, he held out the strong-box toward his father. It was empty. We saw the red silk lining, and the contorted metal where the lock had been forced.

The manuscript of "Caractacus" had vanished quite away.

Old Ararat was beside himself. Thomas Percy was racked between indignation and pure grief. Only Dr.

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Johnson maintained a philosophical calm.

"Pray, Mr. Ararat, compose yourself. Remember the playhouse copies are safely taken off. You have lost no more than a parcel of waste paper."

"But, sir," cried Malone, "the very hand of the Bard!"

"And a very crabbed hand too," rejoined Johnson, "old Quiney over the way will engross you a better for a crown."

"But, pray, Dr. Johnson," I enquired, "is not its value enormous?"

"Its value is nil. 'Tis so well-known, and so unique, that the thief can never sell it; he can only feed his fancy, that it is now his. Let him gloat. 'Caractacus' is ours. Tomorrow we shall see Garrick play the British hero; the day after tomorrow it will be given to the world in an elegant edition. The thief has gained, Mr. Ararat has lost, nothing but old paper."

But Percy and the Ararats thought otherwise. We deployed like an army through the domain of the good stationer, and left no corner unsearched. We had up the red satin lining of the coffer; we turned over the stationer's stock-in-trade and the old papers in the shed; we searched the house from top to bottom; all to no purpose. In the end we went away without finding anything, leaving young Anthony stupefied by the chimney-piece and old Ararat, red with rage and searching, blaming the whole thing on the Jubilee.

We were a dreary party as we walked back to the Red Lion in the rain. Percy and Malone stalked on in heart-broken silence. Having given his parcel into Percy's keeping, Dr. Johnson swayed along muttering to himself and touching the palings as we passed. Alone retaining my wonted spirits, I broached in vain half a dozen cheerful topicks, and at last fell silent like the rest.

Arrived in the court-yard of the Red Lion, Dr. Johnson took his parcel from Percy's hand and vanished without a word. I lingered long enough to take a dram for the prevention of the ague. Percy and Malone were sorry company, quaffing in silence by my side, and soon by mutual consent we parted to shift our wet raiment.

In the chamber I shared with Dr. Johnson (dubbed, according to the fancy of Mr. Peyton the landlord, after one of Shakespeare's plays, "Much Ado about Nothing") I found my venerable friend, shifted to dry clothing, muffled in a counterpane and staring at the fire.

I ventured to enquire where in his opinion the sacred document had got to.

"Why, Bozzy," replied he, "some Shakespeare-maniac has got it, you may depend upon it, or as it might be, some old-paper maniac. Some scavenging antiquarian has laid hold of it and gloats over it in secret."

"I cry your pardon," said Dr. Percy, suddenly appearing at our door. He was white and uneasy still. In his hand he carried a parcel.

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"Pray, Dr. Johnson, do you not have my parcel that I brought from Mr. Ararat's?"

"I, Dr. Percy? I have my own parcel." Dr. Johnson indicated it where it lay still wrapped on the table.

Percy seized it, and scrutinized the wrappings narrowly.

"You are deceived, Dr. Johnson. This parcel is mine. Here is yours, which I retained in errour for my own. I fear I have disarranged it in opening. Pray forgive me. I see you have opened mine more neatly."

"'Tis as I had it of you," replied Dr. Johnson.

"You have not opened it!" cried Percy. "Well, Dr. Johnson, now we each have our own again, and no harm's done, eh? We lovers of good paper have done a shrewd day's bargaining, have we not, ha ha ha!"

"I will wager mine was the better bargain," said Dr. Johnson good-humouredly. "Come, open up, let us see."

"No, no, Dr. Johnson, I must be off," and Percy whipped through the door before either of us could say a word.

"Now," remarked Dr. Johnson, "'tis seen that Peyton was well advised to name our chamber 'Much Ado about Nothing'."

The rain continued in a dreary stream, so that boards had to be laid over the kennel to transport the ladies dry-shod into the amphitheatre; but for all that, the great masquerade that night was surely the finest entertainment of the kind ever witnessed in Britain. I was sorry that Dr. Johnson elected to miss it. There were many rich, elegant, and curious dresses, many beautiful women, and some characters well supported. Three ladies personated Macbeth's three witches with devastating effect, while a person dressed as the devil gave inexpressible offence.

I own, however, that 'twas my own attire that excited the most remark. Appearing in the character of an armed Corsican chief, I wore a short, dark-coloured coat of coarse cloth, scarlet waistcoat and breeches, and black spatterdashes, and a cap of black cloth, bearing on its front, embroidered in gold letters, VIVA LA LIBERTA, and on its side a blue feather and cockade. I also wore a cartridge-pouch, into which was stuck a stiletto, and on my left side a pistol. A musket was slung across my shoulder, and my hair, unpowdered, hung plaited down my neck, ending in a knot of blue ribbons. In my right hand I carried a long vine staff, with a bird curiously carved at the long curving upper end, emblematical of the sweet bard of Avon. In this character of a Corsican chief I delivered a poetical address on the united subjects of Corsica and the Stratford Jubilee.

I cannot forbear to rehearse the affecting peroration:

"But let me plead for LIBERTY distrest,
And warm for her each sympathetick Breast:
Amongst the splendid Honours which you bear,

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To save a Sister Island! be your Care:
With generous Ardour make US also FREE;
And give to CORSICA, a NOBLE *JUBILEE*."

As I came to an applauded close, I heard a resonant voice at my elbow.

"Pray, Bozzy," demanded Dr. Johnson, peering at me with disfavour, "what is the device on your coat? The head of a blackamoor upon a charger, garnished with watercress?"

"That, sir," I replied stiffly, "is the crest of Corsica, a Moor's head surrounded by branches of laurel. But what brings you from your bed, whither you were bound when I left you?"

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "somebody in Stratford is in possession of the missing manuscript of Mr. Ararat. Here I have them all gathered under one roof, and all out of character, or into another character, which is just as revealing. I am here to observe. Let us retire into this corner and watch how they go on. To him who will see with his eyes, all secrets are open."

"Tooth pick cases, needle cases, punch ladles, tobacco stoppers, inkstands, nutmeg graters, and all sorts of boxes, made out of the famous mulberry tree," chanted a musical voice behind us. We turned to behold the very figure of the man with the tray. His brilliant eyes twinkled behind his mask.

"Goods from the mulberry tree," he chanted, "made out of old chairs and stools and stained according, tooth pick cases, needle cases, punch ladles —"

A blast from a trumpet cut him off. Beside him stood a second mask, garbed "like Rumour painted full of tongues," impersonating Fame with trumpet and scroll.

"Pray, sir," said Dr. Johnson, entering into the spirit of the occasion, "let us glimpse your scroll, whether our names be not inscribed thereon."

The mask withheld the scroll, and spoke in a husky voice:

"Nay, sir, my scroll is blank."

"Why, sir, then you are the prince of cynics. What, not one name? Not *Corsica* Boswell? Not Garrick? Not Shakespeare? Sir, were I to betray this to the Corporation, you should stand in the pillory."

"Therefore I shall not reveal myself — even to Dr. Johnson —" replied the mask in his husky voice. He would have slipped away, when one of those spasmodic movements which cause my venerable friend so much distress hurled to the ground both trumpet and scroll. In a contest of courtesy, Fame retrieved the trumpet and my venerable friend the scroll.

"You say true," remarked the last-named sadly, re-rolling the scroll, "on the roster of Fame, my name is not inscribed."

He restored the scroll with a bow, and Fame made off with the mulberry-wood vendor.

"I interest myself much in the strange personages of this assemblage," remarked my philosophical

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friend. "Alack, there's a greater guy than you, *Corsica* Boswell, for he's come out without his breeches."

I recognized with surprize the fiery mop and blank face of young Ararat, whom I had last seen that morning weeping for the lost manuscript. He was robed in white linen, and carried scrip and claymore. He wore no mask, but his face was daubed with blue.

"'Tis Anthony," said I, "he personates Caractacus, the British hero. Sure he trusts in vain if he thinks to conceal his identity behind a little blue paint."

"To the man with eyes, the heaviest mask is no concealment," replied Dr. Johnson; "sure you smoaked our friends with the scroll and the mulberry wood in spite of their valences."

"Not I, trust me. Fame's husky voice was no less strange to me than the wizened figure of the pedlar."

"The husky voice, the bent figure, were assumed for disguise," replied Dr. Johnson, "but Percy's long nose was plain for all to see, and Malone's mellifluous tones were no less apparent. They thought to quiz me; but I shall quiz them tomorrow."

I was watching young Ararat, with his father the center of a sycophantic group of masks who made *lions* of them. Young Anthony was as impassive as ever, but his face was as red as his father's. Lady Macbeth plucked at his elbow; the three Graces fawned upon him; in the press about him I saw the trumpet of Fame and the tray of the mulberry pedlar.

"A springald Caractacus," remarked Dr. Johnson, following my gaze, "how long, think you, could he live in equal combat if his life depended on that dull-edged claymore?"

"Yet see," I commented severely, "how the ladies flatter him, whose only claim on their kindness amounts to this, that through no merit of his own he found a dusty bundle of papers in his father's shed."

"While those who can compose, ay and declaim, verses upon *liberty*," supplied Dr. Johnson slyly, "stand neglected save by a musty old scholar."

"Nay, sir," I protested; but Dr. Johnson cut me off:

"Why, sir, we are all impostors here. Fame with an empty scroll, mulberry wood cut from old chairs and stools! Sir, I have canvassed the abilities of the company, and I find that but one sailor out of six can dance a horn-pipe, and but one more box his compass. Not one conjuror can inform me whether he could tell my fortune better by chiromancy or catoptromancy. None of four farmers knows how a score of runts sells now; and the harlequin is as stiff as a poker. So your Caractacus is an impostor among impostors, and we must not ask too much of him."

I looked at the press of masks around the finder and the owner of the missing manuscript, buzzing like bees with talk and laughter. There was a sudden silence, broken by a bellow from old Ararat. The buzzing began again on a higher note, and the whole swarm bore down on our cor-

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ner, old Ararat in the lead. He brandished in his hand an open paper.

Wordlessly he extended the paper to my friend. Peering over his shoulder, I read with him:

"Sir,

The manuscript of Caractacus is safe, and I have a mind to profit from it in spite of your teeth. Lay £100 in the font at the church, and you shall hear further.

Look to it; for if the value of the manuscript is nil, and profits me nothing, as God is my judge I will destroy it. I do not steal in sport.

I am,

Sir,

Your obliged humble servant,

Ignotus"

"The scoundrel!" cried old Ararat. "Where am I to find £100?"

"This is more of your antiquarianism," I remarked, "like a knight of old, the miscreant holds his captive to *ransom.*"

Dr. Johnson turned the letter in his hands, and held it against the lights of the great chandelier. 'Twas writ in a fair hand on ordinary laid paper, and sealed with yellow wax; but instead of using a seal, the unknown writer had set his thumb in the soft wax.

"Why," says he, "the thief has signed himself with *hand* and *seal* indeed. Now were there but some way to match this seal to the thumb that made it, we should lay the robber by the heels and have back the manuscript that Shakespeare wrote."

"Alack, sir," I replied, "there is no way."

"Nevertheless, let us try," said Dr. Johnson sturdily. "Pray, Mr. Malone, set your thumb in this seal."

"I?" said the mulberry-wood pedlar, drawing back.

"I will," said I, and set my thumb in the waxen matrix. It fitted perfectly. The eyes of the maskers turned to me, and I felt my ears burning. Dr. Johnson held out the seal to old Ararat, who with a stormy mutter of impatience tried to crowd his huge thumb into the impression. 'Twas far too broad.

Dr. Johnson tried in turn the thumb of each masker. The ladies' thumbs were too slender, Malone's too long; but there were many in the group that fitted. Dr. Johnson shook his head.

"This is the fallacy of the undistributed middle term," said he. "Some other means must be found than gross measurement, to fit a thumb to the print it makes. Pray, how came you by this letter?"

"'Twas tossed at my feet by some mask in the press," replied old Ararat. "Come, Dr. Johnson, advise me, how am I to come by £100 to buy back my lost manuscript?"

"A subscription!" cried Fame. "The price is moderate for so precious a prize. I myself will undertake to raise the sum for you."

So it was concerted. Dr. Johnson enjoined secrecy upon the maskers, and Fame with his visor off, revealed as Dr. Percy indeed, bustled off to open the subscription books.

We lay late the next day in the

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"Much Ado about Nothing" chamber. Dr. Johnson was given over to indolence, and declined to say what he had learned at the masquerade, or whether he thought that the mysterious communication held out any hope that the missing manuscript might be recovered.

The rain continuing, the pageant was dispensed with. We whiled away the hours comfortably at the Red Lion, while Percy and Malone spent a damp day with their subscription books. Representing the collection merely as "for the Ararats," they found the sum of £100 not easy to be amassed. Toward evening, however, they returned to the Red Lion with £87 in silver and copper, and Garrick's promise to make up the sum when the play's takings should be counted.

Dr. Johnson spurned at the idea of buying back mere paper and faded ink. In his roaring voice he *tossed* and *gored* Dr. Percy for his magpie love of old documents, adverting especially to Percy's recent publication of "The Household Book of the Earls of Northumberland."

"Pray, sir," he demanded with scorn, "of what conceivable utility to mankind can the 'Household Book' be supposed to be? The world now knows that a dead-and-gone Percy had beef to the value of twelve pence on a Michaelmas in 1512. Trust me, 'twill set no beef on the table of any living Percy."

The young Irish lawyer came to the unfortunate clergyman's defense, and fared no better. Johnson was in high good spirits as we dined off a veal pye and a piece of good beef (which the living Percy relished well).

We then repaired to the amphitheatre, where Percy had concerted to meet the Ararats with Caractacus's ransom.

Old Ararat would have none of Dr. Johnson's advice, to ignore Ignotus's letter. He was hot to conclude the business, and would hear of no other plan, than to deposit the £100 in the font as soon as the play should be over and the takings counted.

"Then, sir," said Dr. Johnson in disgust, "at least let us entrap Ignotus, and make him Gnotus. Mr. Boswell and I will watch by the font and take him as he comes for his ill-gotten gains."

"We must stand watch and watch," cried Percy. "Malone and I will relieve you."

"Nay, let me," cried old Ararat.

"So be it," assented Dr. Johnson; and we repaired to our respective boxes to see the play.

We shared a box with Percy and Malone. Dr. Johnson grunted to himself when David Garrick made his first entrance on the battlements, wearing white linen kilts and bedaubed with blue paint. In spite of this antiquarianism, I found myself moved deeply by the noble eloquence, the aweful elevation of soul, with which Garrick spoke the words of this play so strangely preserved for our generation. I was most affected by the solemn soliloquy which concluded the first act:

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O sovereign death,
"Thou hast for thy domain this world immense:
Churchyards and charnel-houses are thy haunts,
And hospitals thy sumptuous palaces;
And when thou would'st be merry, thou dost chuse
The gaudy chamber of a dying King.
O! Then thou dost ope wide thy boney jaw
And with rude laughter and fantastick tricks,
Thou clapp'st thy rattling fingers to thy sides:
And when this solemn mockery is o'er,
With icy hand thou tak'st him by the feet,
And upward so, till thou dost reach the heart,
And wrap him in the cloak of lasting night."

As the act ended, from the stage box the Ararats, father and son, rose to share the plaudits of the huzzaing crowd.

"Davy Garrick," remarked Dr. Johnson in my ear, "has surpassed himself; and King is inimitable as the Fool."

The second act opened with another scene of King's.

"Alack," cries the lovelorn Concairn,
"Alack, I will write verses of my love,
They shall be hung on every tree . . ."

King turned a cart-wheel, ending with a resounding smack on the rump.

"Say rather," he cried, "they shall be used in every jakes, for by'r lakin, such fardels does thy prentice hand compose, they are as caviare to the mob. I can but compliment thee thus, they do go to the *bottom* of the matter."

The pit roared.

"Ha, what?" exclaimed Dr. Johnson. "Bozzy, Bozzy, where's my hat?"

"Your hat, sir? Why, the play is not half over."

Dr. Johnson fumbled around in the dark.

"No matter. Do you stay and see it through. Where's this hat of mine?"

"Here, sir." I handed it to him.

"Whither do you go, sir?" enquired Malone eagerly.

"To do what must be done. Fool that I was, not to see — but 'tis not yet too late." Dr. Johnson lumbered off as the pit began to cry for silence.

We were on pins and needles in our box, but we sat through till Davy Garrick had blessed the land of the Britons and died a noble death, and we joined in the plaudits that rewarded the great actor and the great playwright and the finders of the manuscript. The Ararats were the cynosure of all eyes. It was long till we brought them away from their admirers and down to the church. Percy carried the £100 in a knitted purse. The rain had ceased, and a pale round moon contended with the clouds.

The solemn silence oppressed me as we pushed back the creaking door and entered, and my heart leaped to my mouth when a shadowy figure moved in the silent church. 'Twas Dr. Johnson. He had wrapped himself in his greatcoat, and armed himself with a dark lanthorn. I could smell it, but it showed no gleam.

Without ceremony old Ararat dropped the heavy purse in the

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empty font, and carried young Anthony off for home, promising to return and relieve our watch. I envied Percy and Malone as they, too, departed, with the Red Lion's mulled ale in their minds. They promised to return in an hour's time. Dr. Johnson quenched the lanthorn, and we were left alone in the dark.

I own I liked it little, alone in the dark with the bones of dead men under our feet, and a desperate thief who knows how near? There was no sound. Dead Shakespeare lay under our feet, his effigy stared into the dark above our heads.

We sat in the shadow, back from the font. I fixed my eyes on its pale gleam, whereon the cloudy moon dropped a fitful light through the open door.

I will swear I saw nothing, no shadow on the font, no stealing figure by the open door; I heard nothing, I neither nodded nor closed my eyes. Dr. Johnson fought sleep by my side. The hour was gone, and he was beginning to snore, when the light of a link came toward us, and Percy and Malone came in with the Ararats. Johnson awoke with a snort.

"For this relief much thanks," he muttered. "What, all four of you?"

"Ay," returned Percy, extinguishing the link, "for the Ararats are as eager as we to stand the next watch."

"Let it be so," replied Dr. Johnson, approaching the font, "we will but verify it, that the money is here, and passes from our keeping into yours."

He bent over the font, and his voice changed.

"Pray, gentlemen, step over here."

We did so as he made a light and opened his dark lanthorn.

The money was gone. In its place lay a pile of yellowed papers, thick-writ in a fair court-hand.

Beholding with indescribable feelings this relique of the great English Bard, I fell on my knees and thanked heaven that I had lived to see this day.

"Get up, Bozzy," said Dr. Johnson, "and cease this flummery."

"Oh, sir," I exclaimed, "the very hand-writing of the great Bard of Stratford!"

"'Tis not the handwriting of the great Bard of Stratford," retorted Dr. Johnson.

Old Ararat's jaw fell. The boy Anthony opened his mouth and closed it again. By the light of the lanthorn Dr. Percy peered at the topmost page.

"Yet the paper is old," he asserted.

"The paper may be old," replied Dr. Johnson, "yet the words are new."

"Nay, Dr. Johnson," cried old Mr. Ararat, "this is merely to affect singularity. Eminent men from London have certified that my manuscript is genuine, including David Garrick and Dr. Warton."

"Garrick and Warton are deceived," returned Dr. Johnson sternly. "'Caractacus; or, the British Hero' is a modern forgery, and no ancient play."

"Pray, sir, how do you make that good?" enquired Malone.

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"I knew it," replied Dr. Johnson, "when I heard King use a word Shakespeare never heard — 'mob' — a word shortened from 'mobile' long after Shakespeare dies. Nor would Shakespeare have understood the verb 'to compliment'."

"Then," said I, "the thief has had his trouble for his pains, for he has stolen but waste paper indeed."

"Not so," replied Dr. Johnson, "the thief has come nigh to achieving his object, for the thief and the forger are one."

"Name him," cried Dr. Percy. All eyes turned to old Ararat. His face showed the beginnings of a dumb misery, but no guilt. Anthony's face might have been carved out of a pumpkin.

"If," said Dr. Johnson slowly, "if there were in Stratford a young man, apprenticed to a scrivener and adept with his pen; a young man who has the plays of Shakespeare by heart; and if that young man found as it might be a packet of old paper unused among the dead stationers' gear; is it unreasonable to suppose that that young man was tempted to try out his skill at writing like Shakespeare? And when his skill proved more than adequate, and the play 'Caractacus, was composed and indited, and the Jubilee had raised interest in Shakespeare to fever pitch — what must have been the temptation to put forward the manuscript as genuine?"

"Yet why should he steal his own manuscript?"

"For fear of what has happened," replied Dr. Johnson, "for fear that Dictionary Johnson, the editor of Shakespeare, with his special knowledge might scrutinize the manuscript and detect the imposture."

Old Ararat's face was purple.

"Pray, sir," said Dr. Johnson, "moderate your anger. The boy is a clever boy, and full of promise. Let him be honest from this time forward."

Old Ararat looked at his son, and his jaw worked.

"But, Dr. Johnson," cried Percy, "the hundred pounds!"

Anthony Ararat fell on his knees and raised his hand to Heaven.

"I swear before God," he cried vibrantly, "that I never touched the hundred pounds."

It was the first word I had heard out of Anthony. By the fitful light of the lanthorn I stared in amazement at the expressionless face. The boy spoke like a player.

"Believe me, father," cried Anthony earnestly, still on his knees by the font, "I know nothing of the hundred pounds; nor do I know how the manuscript came to be exchanged for the money, for indeed I never meant to restore it until Dr. Johnson was once more far from Stratford."

"He speaks truth," said Dr. Johnson, "for here is the hundred pounds, and it was I who laid the manuscript in the font."

He drew the purse from his capacious pocket and handed it to Dr. Percy.

"How came you by the manu-

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script?" asked Percy, accepting of the purse.

"It was not far to seek. The forger was the thief. It was likely that the finder was the forger. If Malone's panegyric on my learning frightened him into sequestering the manuscript to prevent it from falling under my eye, then it must have been hid between the time young Anthony left the shop and the time he returned with the empty coffer. He was gone long enough for Mr. Ararat to spin us his long-winded tale. In that space of time he hid the manuscript — surely no further afield than his father's outbuildings. When he came in to us his face and shoulders were wet with rain."

"Tears, surely?"

"Why, his eyes were full of tears. The boy is a comedian. But the drops on his shoulders never fell from his eyes; they were rain-drops."

"But, Dr. Johnson," put in Edmond Malone, "we searched the outbuildings thoroughly, and the manuscript was not to be found."

"The manuscript," replied Dr. Johnson, "lay in plain sight before your eyes, and you passed it by without seeing it."

"How could we?" cried Malone, "we turned over the old papers in the shed."

"Did you turn over the other old papers?"

"There were no other old papers."

"There were," said Dr. Percy suddenly, "for when I visited the — the necessary-house, I turned over a pile of old accounts of the greatest interest, put to this infamous use by the carelessness of the householder. I — ah —" his voice trailed off.

"The forged sheets of 'Caractacus' were hastily thrust among them," said Dr. Johnson. "I guessed so much when I heard the allusion to the jakes as the destination of bad poetry. This thought belongs to the present century, not the age of Elizabeth; and if the thought was in the mind of the writer of 'Caractacus', what more likely hiding-place for a day or two, till Dr. Johnson be far from Stratford once more? In short, I left the play and hurried thither, and found the pages undisturbed where young Ararat had thrust them into the heart of the pile."

"Yet if you only meant to sequester the writings, boy," said Dr. Percy sternly, "how came you to offer to barter them for money?"

Anthony rose to his feet.

"Sir," he said respectfully, "I never meant to touch the money. But Dr. Johnson saw clearly, and said so, that 'twas no theft for profit; and I feared that such thoughts might lead him to me. I saw a way by which a thief might profit, and I wrote the letter and dropped it at my father's feet that the deed might seem after all the work of a real thief. Consider my apprehension, sir," he turned to Dr. Johnson, "when you fitted my thumb into the impression it had made."

Dr. Johnson shook his head.

"Too many thumbs fitted it," he said. "Another way must be found to

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fit a thumb to its print. 'Twas so, too, with the paper. 'Twas clearly from your father's shop; but Percy and I and half Stratford were furnished with the same paper. Again the undistributed middle term."

"Pray, sir, how came you to spare me in your thoughts?" enquired old Ararat.

"I acquitted you," replied Dr. Johnson, "because after Malone's eulogy you never left my side; nor did your thumb fit the print in the wax."

"Pray, Dr. Johnson," added Malone, "coming down here from Mr. Ararat's necessary-house with the manuscript in your pocket, why did you play out the farce? Why not reveal all at once?"

"To amuse Mr. Boswell," replied my friend with a broad smile. "I thought an hour's watch by the bones of Shakespeare, and a dramatic discovery at its end, would give him a rich range of those sensations native to a man of sensibility, and enrich those notes he is constantly taking of my proceedings."

In the laugh that followed at my expense, the Ararats sullenly took themselves off, and we four repaired to the Red Lion.

"Sir," said young Malone, taking leave of us at the door of "Much Ado about Nothing," "this is a lesson in the detection of imposture which I will never forget."

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "you are most obliging. Be sure, sir, that I shall stand by you in your every endeavour to make known the truth. Pray, Dr. Percy, accept of the forged manuscript as a memento of the pitfalls of *antiquarianism*."

Dr. Percy accepted with a smile, and we parted on most cordial terms.

"I blush to confess it," I remarked as we prepared to retire, "but I made sure that Dr. Percy was carrying stolen documents about with him in yonder folio-sized packet he was so particular with."

"So he was," remarked Dr. Johnson. "Therefore I exchanged packets with him. I knew with certainty then that Thomas Percy had not stolen the Shakespeare manuscript, for all his antiquarian light fingers."

"How so?" I enquired.

"Because I knew what he *had* stolen."

"What?"

"A household reckoning of the first Anthony Ararat, showing that the good stationer's family consumed an unconscionable quantity of small beer during the year 1614. The magpie clergyman had filched it from old Ararat's necessary-house!"

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Do you believe in Fate? Listen: we were sitting at our desk putting together the July issue of EQMM. Each issue contains 125 pages of text. If the selected stories total more than 125 pages, we have to cut or substitute; if the selected stories total less than 125 pages, we have to add one or more stories. Well, the July issue came to 122 pages — meaning that we had to add a three-page story to complete the issue. We looked through our inventory of short-shorts, but somehow no story that we already had in stock seemed to provide the exact note of contrast and balance which we felt the July issue needed. As you know, we try to make each issue of EQMM as varied as possible. In the July issue we already had a hardboiled story (American style) by Dashiell Hammett, a boy-detective story (English style) by Edmund Crispin, a straight crime story by Jack Finney, a straight detective story by Francis Leo Golden, an historical detective story by Lillian de la Torre, a scientific detective story by Vincent Cornier, a mystical murder mystery by T. S. Stribling — even detective-story criticism by G. K. Chesterton — surely, you will admit, an unusually diversified omnium-gatherum. Yet we needed three pages more. What would top off the eight pieces already chosen? Not a short-short of straight crime or detection — we already had that. The one variation lacking was — whimsy. Whimsy told with charm and literary grace. And we had no such three-page story in our locker. Well, we were about to compromise, out of sheer necessity, when the morning mail arrived — and in it was a long, thin envelope from Christopher Morley — and in the envelope was a new short-short about Dove Dulcet, the literary detective — and here, by Fate, was precisely what we were looking for!

DOVE DULCET HITCHES HIS WAGON——

by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

I had been most of the day at the State Department, and you know how tiresome that is. (It was Dove Dulcet talking, the literary detective.) I had to wait a long time for my appointments, and had plenty of leisure to study the Great Seal of the United States which is so generously displayed. I had no lunch, and when I got aboard the Congressional at four p.m. I felt I had earned a drink.

Evidently many others had the same idea; when I got to what the railroad timetables call a buffet lounge (you do the lounging, the P.R.R. does the buffeting) there was only one empty seat. It was at a table with three men who were feeling no pain. I was in a mood of solitude and not eager to sit with what my genteel friend the deputy-acting-under-assistant secretary calls knackers. They were far from State-Department in demeanor; shedding cigarette ashes

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all over the starched tablecloth; if they ever wore striped pants they were underpants. Still there was a kind of genial dynamism about them that was rather refreshing, after a day of so much shoe-polish. I took the seat.

I was brooding what to have when the waiter came reeling down the aisle with a large tray. He addressed the three talkers: "Yessuh, yessuh, just what you ordered; thirteen Martinis." He deftly set them down in a cluster without spilling much. As you know, I'm literal; I couldn't help counting them. Thirteen Martinis, each with an olive of large displacement. Then he waited for my command.

Before I could speak the man next me said, "I beg your pardon, sir, would you take our extra Martini? We had to order thirteen for luck, but that leaves one over. If you would accept it you'd be doing us a favor. Just let me spoon out the olive. We have to eat those, it's protocol."

It was rather like the beginning of R. L. Stevenson's NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS. I hoped, as did Prince Florizel in the story, that the spirit was not one of mockery. But the strangers were so cheerful in manner I felt it would be boorish to refuse. I took the goblet, bowed to them, and drank. Each of the others instead of drinking picked up an olive and bowed as he nibbled it. They made no attempt to force me into palaver and I retired to my usual train-reading, an attempt to discover what those topical weeklies mean by reporting the news "in three dimensions." But I couldn't help noticing that my companions didn't drink their cocktails, only dipped out the fruit. Could they be travelling inspectors from some Martini factory? Looking for what Shakespeare called "olives of endless age"? (By which he meant Lasting Peace.)

By the time we got to Baltimore the drinks, except mine, had mostly slopped over onto the cloth. The three genials kept saluting each other; each time they ate an olive they said *Aloha nui nui*. By some of their remarks about *wahinis* and *hoomalimali* I guessed they were old service men from the Pacific. Or maybe numerologists, for they seemed to have a fixation on arithmetic. One of them counted the Martini goblets with his finger and said, "That leaves 36 to come."

I was feeling more friendly by then, and spoke up. "I can't buy 36," I said, "but I'd be happy to offer you gentlemen a round, if you'll really drink it."

They were most polite. "We're very sorry, sir," they said, "we'd like to join you but this is a matter of ritual. It's on expense account. Our next has to be brandy, and we really drink it. The Martinis were just to get exactly 13 olives."

"I'll order a highball and stand by," I said. "You may need help getting off the train."

They told the puzzled waiter to clear away the unconsumed Martinis. "Bring us 12 brandies," they said. Then they summoned the steward

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and insisted on a big balloon-glass. Into this they poured the individual servings and used it as a loving cup. They beamed gaily at me as they swigged in turn. "This is 3-star," they said. "Twelve 3-stars makes 36."

They were getting merry; by the time we crossed the Susquehanna they had a little difficulty in saying it.

"You see how it works out," said one. "13 olives plus 36 cognac makes 49." I knew he was an old Army man because he called it *cone*-yack.

"God Bless America!" exclaimed another. "I won't say more because it's copyrighted."

"Where the air is full of sunlight and the flag is full of stars," said the third, quoting Van Dyke's old poem.

My mind was beginning to work. Good old Hank Van Dyke, I remembered. He worked for the State Department too.

"E pluribus unum!" announced the first, holding up the loving-cup.

"Annuit coeptis!" I suggested. "He approveth beginnings."

But that went past them. Evidently they knew only one side of the Great Seal.

I checked over in my mind to make sure. *E pluribus unum*, 13 letters. *Annuit coeptis*, 13 letters. The simple symbolism of the Founding Fathers. Gosh, even *Congressional*, 13 letters.

"Haven't you forgotten the 13 arrows in the other claw?" I asked. "An eagle can't fly on one claw. Let's have a round of stingers to symbolize the arrows."

"No, no," they insisted. "That's included in the 49. By numerology 49 is 13, 4 plus 9."

"Besides," said one of them, finishing off the big goblet, "We're *pau*."

They paid their check and returned to the chair car. I could see them whispering together as though remarking that they had talked too much. I remembered that *pau* is good Hawaiian for I'm finished, I'm pooped, I'm through.

I called up my broker the first thing next morning.

"Take an order," I said, "and keep it quiet. Buy me all you can, maybe 1000 shares, of American Banner & Bunting."

"Dove, you're crazy," he protested. "The flag business is way down since the War stopped."

"I ran into a bunch of lobbyists on the train," I said. "Big symbol and emblem men. I figure it's all set up in Congress, Hawaii's going to be a State. Every institution, every patriot, will have to have the new flag, with 49 stars. I'm going to be Baby Bunting, right in the fiscal cradle."

"Guess you've got something," he admitted. "A whole new spangle. Hitch your wagon to a spangle. How will they arrange it on the flag? Seven 7's instead of six 8's?"

So I wasn't wasting my time sitting in the State Department studying the olives and arrows and things on the Great Seal. I never waste my time.

State of Hawaii, 13 letters. Aloha nui nui!

Alaska next?

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ONE OF THE GREAT SERIES OF MODERN DETECTIVE STORIES

In our December 1946 issue we brought you Vincent Cornier's "The Smell That Killed," the first of a wondrous new series about detective Barnabas Hildreth. In February 1947 we received a letter from the author — one of the most heart-warming and appreciative letters it has ever been our editorial good fortune to read. Mr. Cornier staked a permanent claim to our friendship when he wrote: "May I say, with a heartfelt sense of gratitude (greater than anything I have ever experienced in all my writing career) how impressed — would it be too much for "British reserve" to admit, how affected I was by the write-up you so kindly gave me? It made twenty-five years of constant strife to perfect the narrative form of the short story worthwhile." It is not too much for "American reserve" to admit that we almost wept.

Mr. Cornier has long been discouraged and disillusioned by the incredible neglect with which both the public and the press have treated the detective-crime short story. "To such as us — 'damned from here to Eternity' — there is no notice. If we, who put into one lean short-story compass, all (and more) than bestsellers deem sufficient meat for a thriller novel . . . who cares? Who cares if we strive to record in the most muscled, bright-eyed, vibrant and greyhound-at-hare English, direct and intensely powerful narrative systems of mystery?" But "EQMM has taught me this — there is a dignity in the mystery story that I knew existed, yet never saw, with honesty, declared."

We wish we could quote Mr. Cornier's letter in full — it is packed with fascinating and provocative information; but space limitations compel us to be selective. Of enormous importance, however, are those facts the author gives us about the Barnabas Hildreth stories. There were fifteen in all, ranging from "The Stone Ear" to "The Throat of Green Jasper." The first showed how Hildreth and Ingram met and the last revealed (with a stunning shock of surprise) exactly WHAT *and* WHO *"Hildreth" was. The author goes on to describe the technique he used in "The Stone Ear": it is perhaps the only known short story in which, according to one critic, "that resolution of climax, hitherto deemed to be ideal and frankly impossible, has been actually achieved — seven thousand words of mystery perfectly sustained until the final one . . .* one *word only, which solves, locks and limits all."*

To say that we simply cannot contain our impatience to read this story is to put it mildly. We have cannonaded the author with pleas to send us

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the text of the whole Hildreth saga, and at the time of this writing we learn that Mr. Cornier has arranged to forward microfilm of all fifteen tales which, immediately on receipt, we shall have printed and enlarged. "If all turns out well," says Mr. Cornier, "I shall be able to let you see better — far, far better — stories than those you have in hand."

So we have in prospect one of the great series of modern detective short stories. In the meantime we offer the second tale of Barnabas Hildreth, telling more "of that ancient mystery that most men miss: of what things do to people."

THE CLOAK THAT LAUGHED

by VINCENT CORNIER

AN IRASCIBLE and unkempt old man who described himself as Joseph Earnshaw Bedford, master-mariner, retired, went to London some time ago to sell an extraordinary kind of treasure. He picked on the world-famous firm of Messrs. Gillard and Aubersohn, of Old Bond Street, West, as that most likely to deal with him at the price he asked for this treasure.

It was a great, glimmering cloak which, at first sight, appeared to be an ecclesiastical or a royal vestment fashioned in cloth-of-gold — a mediæval *pallium*, perhaps, or a semi-barbaric coronation mantle. But examination showed it was of finest chain-mail; an intricately woven system of rectangularly drawn gold wires, all as supple and thin as a woman's metal-mesh purse.

A few nodules of moonstone studded the *rigol* of the collar. The throat clasps were reminiscent of those eclipsed sun-discs which are to be seen ornamenting the May Day harnessings of dray horses. The whole garment would have shrouded a tall man from neck to heels. . . . And Captain Bedford asked a thousand guineas for it.

"Just as many quids as it's years old," he boomed.

"Really?" The suave Claude Aubersohn, who had been summoned by his puzzled buying experts, breathed that word. "I'm so sorry to have to doubt you, Captain Bedford. Mediæval, I'll grant you. But a millennium old — *no* — I'm *very* doubtful!"

"Y'can be what the hell you like, mister!" Bedford was annoyed by the sycophantically smiling group behind Aubersohn. "What a youngster like you thinks don't matter a rap t'me. I'm telling you. And I know, y'see — *I know!*"

"That's marvellous news!" Auber-

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sohn calmly returned. "The exact *genre* and generation of this mantle have sorely puzzled our best experts in such matters. Your deeper knowledge will be valuable, I've no doubt. *Er* — I understood you to say you were a sea-faring man?"

"And y'can chuck y'r high-hatting an' all! It don't come off, see! Afore I took to shipboard I was a Bedford o' Low Ponting, Brummagem. *That* convey anything to you?"

According to his lights Aubersohn was an eminently fair dealer. He recognized the mention of one of the most remarkable gold-workers' families in existence: a family carrying on an exclusive hand-craftsmanship, in a business centuries old. The Bedfords of Low Ponting, Birmingham, were masters entrusted with the noblest of work, and that alone. What one of them would not know about this specimen would hardly be worth the knowing.

"I — I'm sure I beg your pardon." Aubersohn actually made a slight bow. "That being the case, I'm saying no more."

"Well, y'seem t'be able to apologize, anyway," Bedford grimly chuckled, "and that's something." Then he grew more genial, almost confidential. "It was like this, mister. I allus had a bent for the sea and after years in the workrooms, I chucked up and followed that bent — although, mind y', I never entirely neglected my original trade, even if it was only studying theory. So it came about, in 1892, I got took up with the Leybourne-Hatton expedition into Central Mexico . . . looking for ancient *Anahualtecan* remains."

"Ah," sighed Aubersohn, and he surveyed the mantle with a newer intelligence. "I recall something about that expedition. Wiped out, wasn't it?"

"*Aye*, by fever, superstitious *peons*, and murderin' Indians. Sir Albert Leybourne and me did manage to make the coast, round about Vera Cruz, but he'd got his death warrant. He snuffed it ten days later — yellow-jack. Anyway, that's all aside the point. I'm trying to convince you I knows what I'm talking about. That gold cloak was made by the *Anahualtecans* more'n any thousand years ago. An' we dug it out'n the dried-up bed of the Guatualiyi Lake in June, '93."

"*Anahualtecans*, Captain Bedford? I don't quite get you."

"The 'bird-heads,' the 'people of the waters,' if you like. The prime strain of the Toltecs and the later Aztecs; the original people of Central Mexico — worshippers of the sun. . . . But, look here, mister, I'm not giving free history lessons. I'm trying to sell that mantle. What about it?"

"Well, it's not a pennorth of peanuts, is it? One simply can't decide in a minute ——"

"It's a decision within an hour, at any rate, or I'm taking it elsewhere, mister. Can't help it if I'm blunt, an' all that. Y'd better realize just how matters stand."

"Oh, quite!"

"And don't be delicate-minded,

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either. I can't stick niminy-piminy work. Y' needn't be frightened to ask if it's m'own property."

"Certainly that — *er* — consideration does enter."

"*Aye!* Why, now then, we'll soon settle that!" Bedford produced a grubby and bulging foolscap envelope. He emptied it of various documents which he splayed out, like a hand of cards, in front of Aubersohn. "There y'are! Y'll find my master's certificate and identity papers, with photographs and signatures attached, an' all the rest, among that lot. Satisfy y'self I *am* Joe Bedford — then take a look at that letter." He stubbed at a yellowed sheet of notepaper dated "October 7th, 1893." "Sir Bertie Leybourne, poor young feller, was dyin' when he wrote that. That's my title to the mantle."

Aubersohn carefully went through the documents.

"Everything appears very correct, Captain Bedford," he agreed. "But what does Leybourne mean, after he says you can have the cloak, by his phrase: 'if it is possible to find it again?' "

"What he says. Y'don't imagine we made Vera Cruz laden down with gold-work, d'you? *Ugh!* We hadn't no more'n our fly-picked an' tick-ridden hides on us!"

"You'd hidden the stuff again?"

"Aye, in seven different *caches*. It wasn't till 1910 that I managed to get back to that country. Then all I ever rediscovered was the mantle. . . . *I'd* hidden *that!*"

"Quite!" Aubersohn stroked his guardee mustache and smiled, knowingly. "Well, I'm satisfied you're the rightful owner. One final question, though: Leybourne refers throughout his letter to the 'laughing mantle.' What proof have you to provide that this golden cloak merits that curious description?"

Captain Bedford grinned and grabbed hold of the mantle. He gently rippled its gleaming fabric and — *it laughed!*

There was no mistaking the fact. It laughed in the rich contralto of a happy woman. Bedford swept it sideways and it pealed like the brazen contempt of heroes before the sounding of enemy trumpets. He lifted it suddenly and let it straighten its folds in a series of undulations, growing less, and there was heard the shrilling of excited and feather-headed girls at play. He let it slip, caressingly, gently, from his fingers, and its wild structure came to rest with the lowly echoes of a child chuckling about baby jokings on the verge of sleep.

"Now you've come to y'r last chance," said Captain Joseph Bedford. "What's it t'be: a deal, or not a deal?"

"As I — I said before" — Aubersohn was in a vicious quandary — "it's not at all possible to decide a matter like this in a few minutes. You must remember, there is my partner, Mr. Gillard, to consult."

"Then you consult him, lad!" Bedford took the mantle and folded it into a shape to fit the suitcase in which

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he carried it. "I'm not stoppin' you. Y've said y'say, an' I'll say mine — I'll sell it for its old gold value afore I'll be beat. I'll get m' price for it, that way."

"Coming from a Bedford of the Low Ponting Bedfords," Aubersohn cuttingly retorted, "that's puerile nonsense! Utterly ridiculous!" He ignored the pop-eyed fury of the old man and made rapid calculation on the back of an envelope. "Even at seven pounds a fine ounce, troy, there'd have to be nearly ten pounds avoirdupois of gold in that cloak to fetch a thousand guineas — and I'll be damned if it weighs a quarter of a stone!"

The old man pursed his lips as though something were sour behind them, but a reluctant glitter of admiration was in his eyes. He stopped packing the mantle and looked up.

"Right enough, mister! A very good point! Well, an' how d'y' account for that?" He tapped the apparently solid collar and the clasps. "*Looks* heavy enough, don't it!"

"I'm afraid looks won't affect the matter. It's certainly not solid goldwork throughout — couldn't be."

Bedford muttered something, then stood on the seat of a chair. He suspended the mantle by its ornate collar and shook its fabric as determinedly as a housewife puts a full-bodied wave into the shaking of a dusty rug.

This time Aubersohn and his buyers started back, their hands going up to their assaulted ears. Although they had experienced its faculty for making laughter-like sounds, they were not prepared for this. . . . It was a man-made thunder: an immense concussion. They felt they were made breathless in the midst of a battle of bells. Turmoils of clangorous air burst on them with stunning force and there were those velvety violences which castle upon the bankings of great organ pipes, in their fullest voicing. Then, in the collapse of all this power, the tunes of laughter came to life again. . . .

"*Not gold?*" snarled Captain Bedford. "Why, this is the mantle of the very god of gold! It's what the priests wore when they served his altars. Not gold? *Ugh!*"

Aubersohn was a rich man, and young.

"Captain Bedford," he rapped, "I'll take this on my own responsibility." He stretched out his soft, moist hands. "You shall have your thousand guineas. . . . Give me that lovely thing!"

With notes for two hundred in his wallet and a check for the balance alongside, it pleased Captain Joseph Bedford to be expansive. His mood was nourished by a perfect Madeira which Claude Aubersohn produced — that, and a fine cigar, which he enjoyed in a private room.

Aubersohn wanted the old fellow to talk. He wanted to know everything about his purchase. But Bedford had little to tell. He merely amplified his account of the original discovery of the mantle in the volcanic mud-

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floor of Lake Guatualiyi, adding to this a pronouncement by Professor Hatton, the scientific member of the lost expedition.

"Old Hatton said as how this thing'd be made t' imitate human happiness an' heavenly wrath — laughter an' thunder. He said it would be worn at festivals, in honor of *Quetzalcoatl*, the *Anahualtecans'* golden god. Those were proper happy moments, it seems: ceremonies o' flowers an' scents an' fun — carnivals like."

"That runs absolutely contrary to all I've ever known, Captain Bedford! I always understood those ancient Mexicans to be a fiendishly cruel race, addicted to human sacrifice."

"You're talkin' about Aztecs. I'm not! Those bloody-minded beggars worshiped a cannibal god, *Huitzilopochtli*. They followed on after the original *Anahualtecans* had left the land, acause o' drought or plague or somethin', in the eighth century. *Now*, d'you see?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Y're thinkin' all cock-eyed," Bedford growled. "What you've got in mind's a sort o' medley o' sun-worshipers' treasure, the *Conquistadores*, an' the golden Spanish Main; ain't it now?" Aubersohn looked wry and nodded. "Well, forget it! I'm talkin' of a marvellous race of mild-hearted people, whose civilization died out nigh on six hundred years afore them times. . . . The greatest masters o' the art o' gold-working this world has ever known!"

Captain Bedford barefacedly applied himself to that exquisite Madeira. He refilled his big glass without so much as "by your leave." He was acting the skipper at his own cabin table again — master of immediate circumstance, amenable to no other man's convention or law. As the rich wine influenced him, he grew boastful and chuckled, as though in possession of a vast and secret joke.

"Aye," he vaunted at last, "the greatest gold-workers there's ever been . . . till my time — *me!*"

Aubersohn made some cold rejoinder.

"*Oh*, y'needn't fash y'rself, Mr. Aubersohn! I'm not talkin' punk. Here, look at these!"

He pulled out a dirty roll of linen tied with tapes. Opening this, two tissue-paper wrapped packages were disclosed, which, on their opening in turn, displayed to Aubersohn a magnificently floreated Spanish hair-ornament and a bundle of long gold wires — rectangularly drawn filaments, similar to those which went into the formation of the cloak that laughed. A kind of vaseline-like coating dulled the glimmering of these wires, but the hair-comb was dryly brilliant and clean.

Aubersohn picked up the ornament, then made a move to take hold of the wires. Bedford shot out a hand, clutching his wrist, and preventing him.

"Nay, nay, mister — the comb if y'like, but leave them others alone!" The affronted Aubersohn had the im-

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pression that Bedford was casting about in mind for some excuse. It came: "Y'see, mister, it's like this here — them wires has been varnished with a — a special sort of preparation. If you go fingering about 'em y'll do 'em no good. . . . They're still tacky."

That was quite convincing. On closer examination Claude Aubersohn acknowledged that the square-edged wires appeared to have been newly varnished — with a dingy lac, that sent up a waveringly poignant scent which he recognized but could not for the moment define. Then a chord of memory was touched and he associated the thin and peculiar smell with creeper-clad ruins. It was that of rain-washed ivy heated by a sudden sunlight, in still airs.

Then Aubersohn forgot the wires. Bewilderingly he realized that in his right hand was poised a miracle. This Spanish-looking comb was of massive gold — he twanged its teeth and tested the strength of its high upstanding back — yet had it been made of aluminum it could not have been more delicately light. Instead of having the downdrag of the third heaviest precious metal, it was as insignificant in weight as a bit of millboard.

And while he was gazing like a zany at the comb, an opened penknife came sliding across the table-top towards him.

"Go on, lad! Y've done y'r best to prove it or bust it — do a bit more, wi' my compliments! *Go on!* — take that knife an' try t' scratch it. If y' can, I — I'll make y' a present of it."

The small blade of the penknife was turned by the gold of the comb. . . . Instead of being soft and vulnerable, the precious stuff was as adamantine as high-speed tool-steel.

"Now, then, Mister Aubersohn," said Captain Bedford, "there y've got gold of nigh on twenty-four carat fineness, as light as aluminum, instead o' being heavier than lead. And, instead o' being *softer* than lead, y've got a gold so hard that naught short of a diamond point can rive its skin! *I* made that hair-comb, in exactly the same way as them old *Anahualtecans* made that mantle. And, what's more, *I hardened* that gold — as the gold o' that mantle's hardened." Once again he emptied and replenished his glass. "Poor old Joey Bedford, the bloomin' mug — better'n any other goldcraftsman in the world! . . . Master of a secret worth millions, an' reduced t' selling a museum piece worth five thousand quid — t'get a bite an' sup in his empty old belly! How's that for the irony o' life, lad?"

Deftly but delicately Aubersohn regained command of the situation. He saw that care was needed — Bedford was deliberately inflaming himself with the Madeira, and a drunken *contretemps* on those dignified business premises could never be allowed. And yet the very fact of Bedford's drinking was loosening his tongue . . . to unbind, as well, the glowing roll of fortune.

Aubersohn trembled behind his

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mien of patient tolerance. This old man was uttering wonder. There was no disbelieving him. Instinct was the monitor, and it was sanction absolute for every thrilling word. . . . When first it was unearthed, the extreme hardness and the lightness of the *Anahualtecan* mantle had puzzled Bedford. He had laid his bewilderment before Professor Hatton. The scientist told him that the gold had been tempered or "case-hardened," as steel is case-hardened. He had no suggestion to offer in the mystery of the apparent defeat of specific gravity. By rights, the weight of that cloak should have been five times greater than it was.

As to the "hardening" of the gold — Bedford did not need instructing as to the value of that. He knew the art was anciently practised, but its secrets had been lost. To resurrect that art would mean great wealth. . . . So, for twenty-five years, he had labored at the problem: seeking to make the laughing mantle yield the craft-mystery it embodied.

He had succeeded, but it cost him all his savings. Latterly he had recourse to a money-lender, one Julius Schillam, of High Holborn, who masqueraded as a patents agent. From this man Bedford had nearly a thousand pounds in loans.

There was infinite security. Schillam was no philanthropic fool. From such specimens as the Spanish comb, it was evident that Bedford's patient research work had succeeded. It was merely a question of waiting until the commercial reward was reaped.

There the old seaman was foundered. He had not realized Schillam played a treacherous game. The patent specifications and everything else — with the one exception of the chemical formulæ — were in Schillam's keeping. But the business stopped there. At first Bedford was impatient for progress, then annoyed, and finally angrily suspicious.

Schillam showed his hand. His ultimatum was: a fifty-fifty interest in the whole commercial exploit and an immediate furnishing to him of the necessary chemical formulæ, or he would cry off and sue for the return of his lent money.

Bedford defied him, trusting to justice from the Law. But when the case was heard he was astounded to discover he was not permitted to "drag in the irrelevant issues of some problematical patent." . . . Judgment was delivered for Schillam. The money and costs had to be paid forthwith.

Bedford made a desperate decision. He packed all his tools and chemicals; committed his precious formulæ to mind and burned their written records — disappeared into the East End and laid low.

Starvation found him out at last. He had no resources except the mantle and that Spanish comb. He decided to sell the mantle, despite Schillam's bailiffs. He had no sentiment regarding it. It had taught him all it ever could teach. What its long-dead makers knew, he had rediscov-

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ered and reapplied to the last iota. It was useless to him now.

The money Aubersohn had paid — Bedford was brutally frank — would provide for him in some quiet country place, until such time when he could influence some honest investor in the pending patent. Schillam would not matter, then. There would be money enough to settle his claims, and to spare.

It was all very naive but all so importantly a part of the old sailor's simple and uncompromising faith in the eventual triumph of right. . . . And Aubersohn was oddly touched.

"Captain Bedford," he said, "you'll really have to go, shortly. I'm a very busy man, y'know. But I'd like you to know this as well — it might be possible for me to provide financial aid for your patents scheme. I don't make you any rash promise but, I repeat, it might be possible."

"I — I wish to God it were, sir!"

"Well, we'll have to see. It's obvious you must have financial backing. Equally is it obvious that, if I am to provide it, I must have every opportunity of exploring the commercial possibilities you say exist. Also I must know very much more about you, Captain, than I do at present! I admit that's blunt — but then, you tell me, you don't like niminy-piminy work."

"Y'r talkin' in a way as I can understand, mister."

Aubersohn considered. Then he decided to test Bedford to the uttermost.

"Would you — dare you — let me interview this chap, Schillam?" He saw Bedford was puzzled but in no sense disconcerted. "What if I called on him, representing myself as interested on your behalf, and negotiated with him?"

"*Aye*; but what for?"

"Get it from him, in writing, that he'll release all your patent specifications, *et cetera*, on the settlement with him of the money, and the law costs, you owe him. Don't you realize that's the first, and most vital, step? There's no knowing what he'll have been up to, behind your back, while you've been playing 'possum in the East End!"

Bedford was rocked by that. It had never crossed his mind that Schillam still remained in possession of the most important, and carefully documented, part of the gold-working secret. Lucky chance might place him in an invulnerable position . . . if he managed to solve the riddle of the formulæ. . . . Bedford would have lost a fortune and would have wasted a quarter of a century's work, for Schillam's benefit.

He grew quite frantic. Indeed, he extracted a promise from Aubersohn that he would open negotiations instantly. He gave Schillam's address, and Aubersohn said he would visit the fellow that night.

Then Aubersohn furnished Bedford with his home address, in Golders Green, and wrote down a Speedwell exchange telephone number. He was eminently satisfied: Bedford's tale would bear the strictest investigation.

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"It'll take you some time to get fixed up in that country cottage, Captain," he said. "Anyway, I'm relieving you of any liability of confiding in me your precise whereabouts." He gave Bedford the paper. "That'll find me, any time."

"I've been livin' over a — a sort o' sailors' junk-shop — Jake Clegg's place, in Shadwell."

"Never mind, Bedford; you'll find some better place now, I hope. Anyhow, when you want to arrange another meeting, just ring up and say so. And when you 'phone, you needn't give your name — just call yourself 'Mantle.' Say, 'Mantle, wanting to speak to Mr. Aubersohn,' and I'll guarantee you'll get on to me and no one else. I'll tell my domestic staff that the mention of that word demands priority of attention, day or night. Now, *satisfied?*"

Captain Joseph Bedford solemnly thrust out his horny right hand.

"*Shake*," he said. . . . Claude Aubersohn shook.

Not until Bedford had been gone half an hour did Aubersohn notice he had left the Spanish comb and those wires behind him, on a chair. Aubersohn picked them up, intending to put them in the safe. Then he remembered that Gillard, his partner, had equal access to that safe.

Preferring not to endure awkward questionings at this stage, Aubersohn placed comb and wires in an inner pocket. Respecting Bedford's warning, he most carefully refrained from fingering the tacky varnish on those wires — which proceeding might have done them damage, Bedford had said.

Yes, an eminently fair dealer was Mr. Aubersohn.

The patents agent, Julius Schillam, died at half-past eight that night. . . .

His clerk stated that when he left the office, just after six, Schillam was engaged with a Mr. Claude Aubersohn on business connected with an affair kept on file and marked: "Mexico — B — Goldwork." The clerk was sorry he could not tell more. The file was strictly private; always kept in Schillam's safe. Oh, yes, Mr. Schillam was quite well at six o'clock — although he seemed in a temper about something.

At seven o'clock a charwoman heard Schillam stamping about his office, muttering and cursing and making little, sharp sounds of pain. By half-past seven he had barricaded himself in the suite and was yelling at the top of his voice. In another half-hour he had wrecked the interior, throwing everything portable out of the windows. . . . At twenty-past eight, police and firemen, accompanied by two doctors, broke into the place.

On seeing Schillam, the doctors ordered the rescue team to stand back. There was hardly need for that. Schillam's hands and face were almost unrecognizable. They were swollen and yellow and purple-splotched like the casement of an over-ripe pomegranate.

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As the doctors touched him, he collapsed and died.

The suite was sealed, the corridor declared isolated, and the whole great business floor put under guard — closed down.

All of which, coming under the uncannily perspicacious notice of Fleet Street men, pointed to a certain conclusion. Still, they did not so much as whisper their thoughts at first. Placards of late evening newspaper editions merely proclaimed: "Amazing Holborn Scenes" — "Financier's Mysterious Fate" — "Drama in Office."

Not until ten o'clock was a special edition issued, with a few lines of "fudge" in the stop-press box and an ominous placarding of one red word on an expanse of white newsprint . . . PLAGUE? . . . and London's strange old heart stood still.

It had taken the newspapermen long to decide. Not in time — time was not the measure of the circumstance. Terrifying experience was that. Even as the machines ran off their copies the toll of the "plague deaths" rose to four. A constable, a street fruit-hawker, and a barman who had worked in Fetter Lane, were the victims. They had died as Schillam had died. And swift investigation proved that these men had formed part of the crowd which stood and, crowdlike, found vast amusement in dodging the rain of assorted articles Schillam threw from his windows.

That printed word shocked Whitehall. Its import brought a horde of anxious officials to an all-night consideration of the problem. Here, about the City of London, menace was stalking with speed. At midnight the death-roll stood at seven — and only one man, so far, had survived.

I shall never forget that crisis. Where the evening papers had ended their work, ours, on the *Daily Post*, began. The atmosphere throughout the news-rooms was almost as awesome as if we dealt with another outbreak of war. And affairs were especially complicated by an official warning to discount the news to our "utmost discretion."

We replied that policy demanded the widest circulation of the story: our duty was to open the public eye.

Officialdom thundered back — *No*, a thousand times, no! Publicity would paralyze the business heart of the capital. It was doubtful if plague did exist. In fact, one expert had definitely pronounced against it. This expert's name? No need for secrecy . . . a Mr. Barnabas Hildreth.

That was enough for me. My policy was dictated by an implicit trust in the sanities of friend Barnabas. I let it be thoroughly understood that I *was* the editor of the *Daily Post* — and killed the story.

So home to Bayswater where, in the very small hours, I was astounded to find light and warmth and the ineffable Barnabas, making himself free of my quarters, just sitting down to a breakfast he had prepared for himself and me.

"Timed it exactly, haven't I?" he

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chuckled. "I rang up your office and found you'd gone; hence this. Hope you don't mind," and he poured out coffee.

"You look pretty perky for a plague-hunter! Is the job over?"

"I hope so. Seven or eight have snuffed it, so I'm told — but it wasn't plague. Damnably like it, though!" He ate placidly for a while. "I've just come away from the bedside of the luckiest man in England, a chap called Aubersohn. He's laid up with a nasty hand and arm, but he's the sole survivor. And he's been saved by advice telephoned to his doctors by a fellow called Bedford . . . the original 'carrier,' thinking in terms of plague, if we must."

"But I don't quite get you ——"

Then Barnabas outlined the story I have already set down, after working from Aubersohn's later and more detailed account.

When he had finished, breakfast also was ended.

"That arrangement of using the code-word 'mantle' undoubtedly has saved Aubersohn from going the way of the others," he concluded as we lit cigarettes. "More than that, it's indicated a way in which to combat further cases, if and when they arise. . . . Bedford must have seen the evening papers, and reading of Schillam's death, together with Aubersohn's illness, he decided to do what he could."

"I see! He rang up Golders Green, introduced himself as 'mantle' — and actually dared to give the doctors who were attending Aubersohn, their instructions? Cool, I must say!"

"I don't think so. Bedford was safe enough. He had liked Aubersohn and, knowing that plague wasn't the trouble, took steps accordingly. He told the doctors of a treatment which was very similar to that used in fighting the venoms of snake-bite."

"But — but what had caused the death of Schillam?"

"Those gold wires Bedford left behind him . . . or, to be precise, the sticky 'varnish' on them. That stuff was a terrible and instantly penetrating poison. Remember, Bedford wouldn't let Aubersohn touch them. Then Aubersohn, playing fairly, was careful with them after Bedford's departure. So his life's been saved.

"He carried them in his pocket, you'll recollect. Well, when he visited Schillam, prepared to buy the fellow off, Aubersohn was fool enough to produce them in course of conversation. . . . Schillam handled them before he could be denied. He did more — he contrived to steal four or five of them.

"I argue that Schillam realized that the sticky varnish held the one key he wanted to unlock the whole of Bedford's secret gold-working process. He probably had every clue except the actual formula of the lac which coated those wires — which weren't wires at all!

"However, Schillam hung on to them. And after Aubersohn left, at six-thirty, he would concentrate on them, never knowing that every

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sticky touch upon his flesh was just another nail in his coffin.

"Then the poison entered his system. He realized then . . . and in the delirium preceding his collapse, he must have pitched them out of the window, with other things. Gold is gold . . . that constable, the costermonger, and that barman each had one of those glittering death-traps when they were searched in hospital. Each was in that hilarious crowd."

"If they weren't lengths of gold wire, *what* were they?"

"Sounds quite mad, Geoffrey — but you can't doubt a scientific determination: they were fine spines, gold-plated in a most revolutionary manner . . . coarse and hair-like excrescences produced from an armadillo's carapace." He got up and impatiently waved my questionings aside. "Now, are you fit? I've an idea that Bedford will have gone to earth again in that East End haunt of his. I'm going to visit 'Jake Clegg's place in Shadwell' — coming?"

As dawn was breaking we found Clegg's junk-shop: a fusty, ramshackle, and glass-fronted dump for rubbish ranging from sailors' curios to old guns; from sea-boots to parrots.

Oh, no, Jake Clegg knew nothing at all about Captain Joseph Bedford. Moreover, he "took it proper crool fer two blokes what wasn't even coppers" to come turning him out of his honest bed like this.

But we were well inside his shop — and Barnabas Hildreth had cocked a ruminative gaze on two grotesque-looking specimens which hung above a fireplace, in a dark nook. So recently had the beast been mentioned, I immediately identified these as being the armor-banded shells of armadillos. . . . Coarse and gingery growths, like coconut fibre riddled with thousands of tiniest pores, or holes, fringed the edgings of each transverse plate.

"Quite sure, now, you know nothing about Captain Bedford?"

"Nao! S'welp me strite mortal blind if ——"

"Please spare yourself the oath," Barnabas smiled. Then he walked up to the shells and examined them carefully. "Tell me, Mr. Clegg, were these armadillo coverings smooth and polished when you hung 'em up?"

"Yus. Puffictly smoove. Them whiskers sorta starts ter grow on 'em after a bit, an' keeps on growin', so long's they're kep' warm an' dry. But them's not fer sale, mister."

"No — I realize that, Mr. Clegg. I don't want to buy them. . . . They'll be of far more use to Captain Bedford ——"

Clegg uttered a word not to be written. Then he shuffled away from us with his broken teeth bared in a ferocious grin. He crossed to the well of a flight of stairs, and shouted:

"*Ey,* Bedford! Gime's up — the blurry Busies is 'ere!"

The heart-taking smash of a shot shook all the place. And with the staggering downfall of a body, we rushed the stairs, Barnabas Hildreth cursing . . . *cursing*. . . .

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Joseph Earnshaw Bedford had blown out his brains.

Ten days went past before Hildreth bore down on me again, his case completed by the research reports of half a dozen different scientists who had tried to solve the riddle of the mantle.

I learned that, in its first state, no gold went into its make-up. Originally its collar and clasps had been carved from the soft and porous shell-material of the armadillo. The "chain mail" had been *knitted*, exactly as wool is knitted, out of long and equally porous fibres — square-edged excrescences which perpetuate shell growth, cellular structure, after the swamp beast's death. They grow in its lifetime as well, but constant rooting activities keep them blunted to nothingness.

The genius of the *Anahualtecans* transformed this unlikely stuff into that shimmering golden cloak! When carved and knitted, the thing was plunged into a vat containing a lac in which particles of gold were held in suspension; dissolved. The dry shell and the fibres soaked up this stuff until every pore was laden with fluid metal. . . . Now the mantle was dried. After drying it was "fired," as porcelain is fired.

The lac was driven off in the form of vapor. The gold remained behind — its outer skin fused into a glossy mass like pottery glaze. The heat which was applied was sufficient to reduce all the shell to impalpable dust, but not fierce enough to melt the interior system of cellular metal. What remained was a man-made replica of Nature's work in forming a bone. The outer "glaze" represented the ivory denseness of bone enamel; the cells of gold, formed beneath this glazing, reproduced a bone's cancellous tissue.

Hence the apparent "defeat of specific gravity" — naturally this infinitely honeycombed production, despite its size, weighed only a fraction of what it would have weighed had it been massive metal. Barnabas provided the best possible illustration, in asking me to consider equal bulks of pumice-stone and iron ore.

"That drives it home," he said. "In that mantle the normal density of solid gold had been replaced by an abnormal manufacture of porous — pumice-stone — gold! Equal bulk; vastly differing weight."

I asked him then about the plague-producing poison.

"Those tacky wires, which Bedford showed to Aubersohn, represented that stage of working, previous to the 'firing' process. They, too, were fibres from an armadillo shell. Bedford had soaked them in precisely the same richly auriferous solution which the *Anahualtecans* employed; his rediscovered secret. The Spanish comb was in another category. It had been fashioned of shell and fibre, soaked, dried out, and then fired — it was harmless, like the mantle.

"But the sticky varnish on those fibres was not!" He smiled, complacently. "Aubersohn was reminded of

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the smell of ivy. That was accurate! The solution containing the dissolved pure gold, so we have determined, was mainly prepared from the lac of an ivy growth — from *Rhus Toxicodendron,* the American Poison-ivy, a cousin of our innocuous Virginian creeper.

"All that family belong to the 'varnish-producing group' of trees. All of them yield mediums used in lacquering with precious metals. But *Rhus Toxicodendron's* sticky sap is far too deadly for any modern employment. Evidently the *Anahualtecans* found a way to control it, even as Bedford did, a thousand years later.

"Yes, it's murderous! The shed cuticle of the growth can make a strong man unconscious, inhaling it. A touch of a leaf means insupportable agony. And that lac, that sap, contains a fixed oil so potent that one drop in a gallon of olive oil produces a flesh-searing stuff stronger than vitriol! Finally, to walk in a place where poison ivy grows can induce on the walker a skin disease like erysipelas; its vapor, its scent, causing that!

"Bedford, if you please, was using a distilled and concentrated essence of that hideous juice. No wonder it burned those poor devils like the flames of plague! Aubersohn vows he only got an accidental tap on his finger from those tacky things — in taking them from Schillam — yet look at his hand and arm! *Ugh* — the business hardly bears consideration!"

And since he shivered into silence, I asked:

"Well, what about the case-hardening of the gold? After all's said and done, that was the greater discovery."

A succession of strange expressions crossed Hildreth's face.

"Ingram, that part of the secret went out of the world when a leaden slug went into a great man's brain. And for my part in that useless suicide, I shall never cease to regret."

"But I don't see what you've got to reproach yourself about."

"Don't you? I'm afraid I do!" He wearily shook his head. "Everything was running so smoothly. . . . The faculty for the emission of laughter-like sounds and a kind of thunder, had been traced to the million little echoing caverns in the spongy gold — these, in turn, had pointed to some bone-like material being used in their formation. . . . Finally, it was decided that the sticky 'wires' were posthumous growths of armadillo shell, loaded with fine gold and poisonous lac. Bedford must have been able to procure such.

"All that remained was the obtaining of proof. And there, in Clegg's shop, proof in abundance was hanging in that chimney ingle. Then, like a fool, I let my self-congratulation override reason. I — I was too cock-a-hoop: cheaply mysterious.

"If only I'd kept my tongue between my teeth, Bedford's secrets would have been alive in the world today — and he with them, a happy man, honored for the genius he was."

So I left him in a brooding silence. I could only agree.

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tinued from other side)

covers of a book—(in fact, *five* books, since volume is actually five books put into one!) 'll be all the more fascinated because he ns so out of place, so "helpless," in the wolfish ld of crime. Yet he can track down "the per- crime" more relentlessly than your toughest th—and throw in plenty of chuckles to boot!

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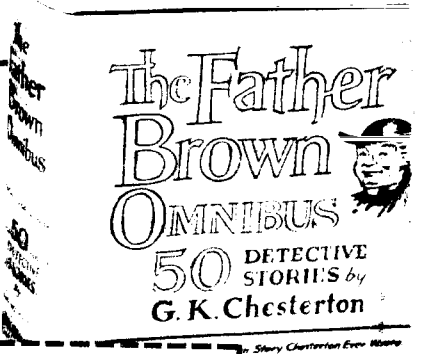

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